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'Poe and Not Poe': A Study of the Radio Adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories

Ashley Davis

Clemson University, akdavis@clemson.edu

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“POE AND NOT POE”: A STUDY OF THE RADIO ADAPTATIONS OF EDGAR
ALLAN POE’S SHORT STORIES

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
Ashley Kathryn Davis
May 2008

Accepted by:
Dr. Jonathan Field, Committee Chair
Dr. Susanna Ashton
Dr. Catherine Paul
Ms. Barbara Ramirez

ABSTRACT

This master's thesis analyzes four of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories—"The Pit and the Pendulum," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "Metzengerstein," and "The Purloined Letter"—in comparison with their respective radio adaptations. Using the texts and Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition" as guides for comparison, it is apparent that each radio play veers greatly from Poe's original work. Although the radio adaptations leave behind some traces of Poe's signature technique, they mostly remove that which was deemed too scary, too dark, or too overly philosophical for radio audiences. Therefore, the stories become at once comforting and disarming, at once familiar and foreign. The listener is thereby presented with a paradoxical view of Poe, as the radio plays curiously turn the original author into a figure who is simultaneously "Poe and not Poe."

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated in loving memory of my late grandfather, W.M. "Peanut"
Ashley, Jr.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE RADIO ADAPTATIONS OF POE'S SHORT STORIES AND POE'S "PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION"

Adaptation is an area of scholarship that has consistently received a great deal of critical attention. Since the advent of radio, film, and television, a number of writers have experimented with adapting the written word to different media, often taking previously published work from the page and reinterpreting it for the stage or the screen. Critics, in turn, have embraced the notion of adaptation, and countless critical works have been written on the subject.

According to author Linda Hutcheon, adaptation exists not only within the realm of critical scholarship but is also ubiquitous throughout everyday popular culture. Hutcheon states, "Adaptations are everywhere today: on the television and movie screen, on the musical and dramatic stage, on the Internet, in novels and comic books, in your nearest theme park and video arcade" (2). Essentially, ideas of reinterpretation, reinventing, and re-doing are ever-present within contemporary culture.

When one considers the most common form of adaptation—adaptation of the printed word—film is usually the first medium that comes to mind. Insofar as adaptation relates to literature, film versions of literary works typically receive the most scholarly attention, more so than any other forms of adaptation. To this effect, Hutcheon observes that when narratives are adapted to a "mode of showing, as in film or stage adaptations," the viewer is automatically "caught in an unrelenting, forward-driving story" (23). The film adaptation moves a reader from "the telling mode" to "the showing mode" (23) and shifts the reader from indirect perception to a more direct method of experience. At

present, we live in a highly visual culture, and it seems only fitting that the visual versions of novels and short stories are usually the first to be analyzed when theorizing adaptation.

However, there are other non-visual methods of adaptation that deserve further consideration. We can learn a great deal from looking at, or more accurately, listening to non-visual methods of adaptation. In his critical work *Radio Drama: Theory and Practice*, radio historian Tim Crook asserts that radio drama has been consistently underrated during the twentieth century. Crook holds that radio drama has not yet received the attention it deserves, yet it is certainly worthy of critical and scholarly consideration. Although this is certainly true, Crook mentions very little about radio adaptation, one of the most important aspects of radio drama. While it is true that the radio drama genre has not nearly been adequately tapped by academics, I believe that it is time for a more critical consideration of radio: specifically, radio adaptations of literary works.

Radio adaptation ultimately offers a new way of thinking about the recreation and reworking of familiar literary texts, opening our minds and ears to a different method of perception. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon mentions that “the performance mode teaches us that [written] language is not the only way to express meaning or to relate stories” (23). Going along with this idea, it is evident that the performance type of adaptation—the umbrella under which radio adaptation lies—has the potential to have an invaluable effect upon a listener’s understanding of a work. Instead of considering radio adaptations as merely entertaining or unentertaining, we must consider them as another

method by which to recount various stories, a method of adaptation that may or may not be truly successful.

By lending a critical ear to radio adaptations of certain works of literature, a relatively untapped area of scholarship can be explored. But what authors or works could be highlighted as examples of the intersection between radio and literature? In order to achieve this new understanding of radio adaptation, one has to look no further than the widely-recognized master of the macabre, Edgar Allan Poe. From 1937 to 1957—a time known as America’s Golden Age of Radio— a number of Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories were adapted into half-hour radio dramas. During this time, familiar Poe tales such as “The Black Cat,” “The Cask of Amontillado,” and “The Fall of the House of Usher” were adapted for a variety of radio shows, ranging from family-based programs to shows which focused solely on tales of horror and suspense.

Over a twenty year span, Poe was immensely popular across the radio dial, and almost every type of radio program presented its own unique version of at least one of Poe’s works. The four adaptations discussed within this analysis—“The Pit and the Pendulum,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “Metzengerstein,” and “The Purloined Letter”—are just a small sampling of the radio adaptations of Poe’s stories that were presented on the air during this time.

But just why was Poe so incredibly popular during America’s Golden Age of Radio? After all, he died in 1849—nearly 100 years before radio writers began to adapt his plays for the air. Why, then, would Poe’s writing be considered so suitable for adaptation? It is true that, since his death, Poe has become a staple in American literature and popular culture. Several of Poe’s stories have found their place in the world of film,

and from the 1920's until today, short stories and poems such as "The Premature Burial," "The Raven," and even "Annabel Lee" have been adapted into over 183 films and television shows ("Edgar Allan Poe"). With America's ever-growing fascination with horror movies, and movement into a highly visual culture, this statistic makes sense. Why, then, would scriptwriters have considered Poe's work an excellent resource for radio presentation?

According to Leonard Maltin's *The Great American Broadcast*, a 1932 publication called *Radio Playwriting* speaks about the nature of radio writing, and explains how radio writing differs from other forms of writing. Jane Sloan, the author of the publication, says, "One of the fundamental requirements in radio dramatization is simplicity. A complicated plot, innumerable characters, varied locales, while permissible in a novel or even on the screen, are prohibited by the limitations of radio presentation" (29). In respect to this statement, it is clear that when choosing a potential story to adapt for radio, simplicity is desirable— even necessary.

Essentially, it seems fair to deem many of Poe's stories "simple," at least on the surface. Many of his stories are based only in narration, with little to no dialogue. "The Pit and the Pendulum," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "The Cask of Amontillado" are just a few of Poe's stories that are told by a single narrator. Other characters come into play within these narratives, but there is no dialogue between the narrator and these others; the stories rest solely on the narrator's thoughts and feelings. Moreover, none of these stories are very long, certainly not even close to the length of some of Poe's other well-known tales like "The Fall of the House of Usher" or "The Masque of the Red Death." As a result, it seems that, according to Sloan's comment about the necessary simplicity of

radio, Poe's stories indeed seem perfect for this kind of presentation. It is their relative simplicity that makes them so appealing to radio writers.

However, it is interesting to note the fundamental paradox of this statement. Although it would appear that Poe's short stories are "simple" enough to fit the radio medium without being altered a great deal, if even altered at all, this is not the case. Each one of the tales discussed within this analysis has been both expanded and reduced: new characters, settings, and dialogue have all been added to these stories, while simple elements of plot have been removed. In short, because of these changes, the themes and meanings of the stories have been completely altered and in effect, have become more convoluted. "Simplicity" has gone right out the window, and each radio play is markedly different from Poe's original work.

In the case of the four adaptations discussed in this analysis, the original texts have been augmented, sometimes drastically and almost past the point of recognition, in order to adhere to the characteristics of the radio medium. Each radio version of Poe's texts have been altered to fit the radio format, and these changes certainly affect the overall presentation of the work.

For one, radio writing nearly always demands that a story—no matter what the length—be either expanded or condensed in order to fulfill a time requirement, and therefore, the story is manipulated in accordance with the demands of the medium. The adaptations of Poe's stories are no exception. The adaptations of these short stories range from just under twenty-five minutes in length to a little over twenty-nine minutes in length, with several commercial breaks included. Since these plays were presented to

large audiences in a relatively short amount of air time, their length undoubtedly impacts the general presentation of the story.

Of course, it can also be said that radio writing inherently demands more emphasis on sound effects and dialogue in order to convey a story in the most vivid, most entertaining manner. Within each of these radio plays, sound functions in an interesting way. In the case of the radio adaptation of “Metzengerstein,” for example, the steady sound of pounding rain is used throughout the entire program in order to lend a sense of menace and gloom to the tale, while the radio adaptation of “The Tell-Tale Heart” relies upon the sound of a thumping heartbeat in order to move the story to its eventual conclusion. Sound effects impact these adaptations both positively and negatively, and in every case, these changes have a profound effect upon an audience’s conception of Poe’s work.

When the radio versions of Poe’s stories are compared to the actual texts, changes such as these are certainly intriguing, and questions arise. Although adaptation frequently occurs within our culture, one cannot help but wonder: can adaptation from one medium to another have the potential to affect the original intent of the story? When a story is taken from the page to the air, for instance, certain changes have to be made, but to what extent do those changes affect an audience’s understanding of the story itself? The alterations make the individual stories almost unrecognizable, and therefore, the meanings, themes, and effects of the stories are changed to something that is distinctly unlike the majority of Poe’s writing. Instead, the radio adaptations of Poe’s stories present the listener with something that is “strangely Poe and not Poe,” all at the same time (Neimeyer 222). Even though the radio versions successfully present Poe to a wider

audience, and therefore make him more accessible to the general public, this bizarre paradox of “Poe and not Poe” affects the listener’s impression of Poe as an author.

In essence, the radio adaptations of Poe’s short stories not only present the audience with watered-down versions of Poe’s work, but they also challenge the overall intent of Poe’s stories. The changes made in the radio broadcasts of Poe’s short stories go against Poe’s own theories as described in his 1845 essay “The Philosophy of Composition.” Although many scholars believe that Poe’s essay should not be taken seriously, it is actually a fascinating piece of work that provides an interesting insight into Poe’s own methods of creation. Using Poe’s essay as a guide, then, it becomes clear that the radio adaptations of his short stories purposefully leave out many of the elements which Poe considers vital to the success of a text and thereby move a listener further and further away from the true nature of Poe.

But how exactly does this happen? To understand this, we must consider several of Poe’s stories in comparison with their respective radio versions, while keeping in mind Poe’s own methods of composition. By looking closely at these dramas, we are able to see that the radio versions of Poe’s short stories present the audience with a “pop culture Poe,” a contradictory figure who is at once comforting and disarming.

CHAPTER TWO

“A CERTAIN DEGREE OF DURATION”: HOW THE RADIO VERSIONS OF “THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM” AND “THE TELL-TALE HEART” IMPACT POE’S INVESTIGATION OF THE PSYCHE

In the introduction to the article “Poe and the Powers of the Mind,” Robert Shulman states, “In his best fiction Poe achieves acute insights into the mysteries, processes, and terrors of the human personality” (245). Shulman contends that many of Poe’s stories are successful because they look deeply into man’s psyche and analyze how the human mind functions when excessive strain is placed upon it. He goes on to say that Poe’s writing “succeeds to the extent that [Poe] can suggestively, precisely, and intensely illuminate the interior of the self, the powers, and the processes of the mind-- and frequently the destructive and irrational powers” (250). According to these statements, as well as comments made by countless other critics, it would seem fair to consider a large amount of Poe’s fiction as stories that deal with the psychological aspects of the human condition.

“The Pit and the Pendulum” and “The Tell-Tale Heart” are two such tales in which Poe attempts to convey the inner-workings of the human mind. By illustrating moments of true terror, mental anguish, and overwhelming guilt, Poe artfully crafts scenes that explore how traumatic instances can affect an individual. In “The Pit and the Pendulum” and “The Tell-Tale Heart,” respectively, Poe presents a plot that deals with torture and a plot that deals with guilt, and uses very calculated language in order to convey how these extreme conditions impact the main characters within the stories.

The radio adaptations of Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" are, however, filled with alterations, both slight and sizeable, which essentially change this aspect of Poe's original work, and thereby skew the meanings of these psychological narratives. Instead of presenting the listener with tales that delve into the functions of the human mind, just as Poe does in his texts, the radio plays turn the original stories into didactic, wholesome tales, and essentially remove Poe's imprint from the various presentations. The audience is instead left with a mere residual form of Poe-- a mere shadow of the author's original intent.

Of course, it can be said that Poe's short story "The Pit and the Pendulum" is a work that dives deep into the mind of man, showing how an individual reacts when faced with the prospect of slow, methodical torment during the Spanish Inquisition. Critic Jeanne M. Malloy writes that the terror of "The Pit and the Pendulum" is a result of the very specific type of language that Poe uses over the course of the story (153). Malloy goes on to indicate several moments in Poe's original text where the imagery lends an overwhelming sense of dread to the work, and thereby more accurately depicts the narrator's affected state of mind. Ultimately, the distressing images and tense language found throughout "The Pit and the Pendulum" illustrate how a torturous Inquisitorial setting impacts the main character-- mentally and physically. In one such instance at the beginning of the tale, Poe describes the narrator's view of his startling surroundings:

For a while, I saw--but with how terrible an exaggeration! I saw the lips of the black-robed judges. They appeared to me white-- whiter than the sheet upon which I trace these words-- and thin even to grotesqueness; thin with the intensity

of their expression of firmness--of immovable resolution--of stern contempt of human torture. (Poe 246)

In these lines, Poe's careful word choice and phrasing highlight the feelings of terror that the narrator experiences. Phrases like "terrible exaggeration," "thin even to grotesqueness," "immovable resolution," and "stern contempt of human torture" (246) punctuate the narrator's feelings of intense fear and mental anguish, and the presence of the grotesque black-robed, white-lipped judges gives the scene a striking sense of foreboding.

Countless other terrifying images abound as the text progresses. Poe's narrator tries to fathom the sights around him, and he mentions that his "vision fell upon the seven tall candles upon the table" (Poe 246). At first, this sight seems to act as a welcome relief of the tension in the pit, but that idea is quickly dispelled. The narrator says, "At first, [the candles] wore an aspect of charity, and seemed white slender angels who would save me; but then, all at once, there came a most deadly nausea over my spirit ... the angel forms became meaningless specters, with heads of flame, and I saw that from them I would receive no help" (246). Within these lines, Poe uses the seemingly benign white candles to depict the narrator's fragmented mental state. The candles initially appear as a pleasant, welcome sight to the narrator-- a benevolent image that "would save [him]" (246). However, as soon as the narrator makes this statement, he recants this notion of salvation and instead views the candles as ghosts with "heads of flame," frightening visions that will do nothing to rescue him from the hands of the Inquisitors.

Regarding these aspects of the text, Malloy notes that Poe's carefully calculated use of rather terrifying language helps the reader understand the work. (Malloy 153-54).

Due to the images presented in the story, Malloy states, “Poe heralds the narrator’s, and hence the reader’s, entrance into a nightmare world of punishment, dissolution, and death, an announcement amply fulfilled by the violence, pain, and horror experienced by the narrator in his prison cell” (154). Certainly, Poe makes specific choices within “The Pit and the Pendulum” in order to convey just how strongly the narrator is affected by torture. In essence, Poe uses tense, terrifying, and almost hallucinogenic language in order to convey the narrator’s tensely heightened response to his surroundings.

In the radio adaptation of Poe’s “The Pit and the Pendulum,” however, the audience finds several drastic changes in plot, character, and theme, which ultimately render the story unlike the majority of Poe’s writing. The radio play turns the story into a different work and thus affects the listener’s potential understanding of Poe’s text.

“The Pit and the Pendulum” was adapted for radio in November, 1957, and was presented as a half-hour episode on the highly successful *Suspense* radio program. During the 1940’s and 1950’s, *Suspense* was one of the most successful and longest-running shows on the airwaves, and was commonly subtitled “Radio’s Outstanding Theatre of Thrills.” From the show’s beginning in 1942, until February, 1948, William Spier served as producer. During his six year tenure, Spier established a number of rules that served as general parameters for the audio plays that were presented, and these rules continued throughout the series’ twenty year run:

Suspense dealt in life-or-death situations. That element was usually established within the first few minutes. Then, through characterization and audio coloring, little touches were added to heighten the sensation of impending doom. That was what suspense was all about: the slow tightening of the knot (Dunning 584-85).

These guidelines were followed in every single *Suspense* play, and “The Pit and the Pendulum” is no exception. The radio play indeed begins with a life-or-death situation—being tortured—and that is exactly what is depicted in Poe’s original text. The radio version commences just as the text of “The Pit and the Pendulum” commences, with the first sentence of the text spoken verbatim: “I was sick—sick unto death with that long agony; and when at length they unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me” (Poe 246). From the start, the radio play is rather faithful to Poe’s original text, as it uses the same first line.

Yet, this initial adherence to Poe’s text is misleading. From the moment after the first line in the radio adaptation, the play deviates from the original story, while adhering more closely to the elements of the *Suspense* format. The narrator tells his name, stating, “The sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy, indeterminate hum from which emerged the syllables of my name: Captain Jean D’Arbray” (“The Pit and the Pendulum”). In this instance, the listener is at once moved closer to and further from the effect of Poe’s original work due to the additions of “characterization and audio coloring” (584) which were so frequently employed by the *Suspense* scriptwriters. As the narrator speaks about the “sound of the inquisitorial voices,” the listener actually hears a soft murmur of voices in the background. This “audio coloring” lets the audience hear what the narrator hears, and therefore, the listener is brought into the story, allowing them to experience what the narrator experiences.

However, the radio play also adds extra pieces of characterization: a seemingly small change which actually moves the story in a disparate, rather ineffectual direction. In the radio version of Poe’s text, the main character is a military officer and has a

specific name, something that Poe does not mention in his story. Although this change does seem to make the story more entertaining, more accessible to an audience, and certainly fulfills the characterization requirement for a typical *Suspense* play, the alteration goes against Poe's text entirely. It is just the first in a series of drastic changes which combine to ultimately undermine the intended effect of the text.

As the play progresses, our narrator, the newly-christened "Jean," speaks about his life, his crimes, the act of facing the Inquisitors, and being confined in his mysterious prison. He moans, "Then, as consciousness swam back to my wits again—darkness! Damp stone floor and darkness!—Oh, Beatrice, oh my wife!" ("The Pit and the Pendulum"). Here, the play version of Poe's story inserts another entirely different element: a brand-new character, the wife of the narrator. Any reader who is familiar with Poe's short story knows that there is no mention of a wife in the text; after all, the reader is not even privy to the name of the narrator. If Poe doesn't bother to mention the main character's name, it follows that he certainly wouldn't feel the need to go into detail about the narrator's family or his personal life. That is not what the story is about.

The significance of this change becomes evident in the subsequent dialogue that Jean "exchanges" with his wife; since he is obviously a prisoner of the Spanish Inquisition, and therefore cannot see or speak to his wife, Jean imagines himself having a conversation with her:

BEATRICE: Did you call me, Jean?

JEAN: Beatrice? You, here? In the dungeons of the Inquisition!

BEATRICE: No, my poor Jean. I am only here in your imagination.

JEAN: Am I mad, then?

BEATRICE: No, but your brain is fevered. You only think you hear me.

JEAN: I hear you clearly. You won't leave me!

BEATRICE: As long as I am in your heart, I will be here! ("The Pit and the Pendulum")

Essentially, this change lends an amorous overtone to Poe's story, something that does not occur in the 1842 text. The original text of "The Pit and the Pendulum" reads as a psychological narrative, not a love story: the text tells the thoughts and frustrations of a man who is being tortured, both in mind and in body. However, in the radio adaptation of Poe's text, because of the addition of the wife character and the various lines of dialogue that she exchanges with the narrator, the story revolves around love. Basically, it is love that saves Jean from the pit: because he is able to hear the voice of his wife in his own imagination, Jean is able to escape the pendulum's blade, and is freed at the very end of the story.

Of course, this could not possibly have been what Poe intended to accomplish within "The Pit and the Pendulum." The actual text is more concerned with terror, suspense, and the mental state of the narrator; Poe never once mentions love, romance, or marriage in the original story. Furthermore, in the original story, the narrator speaks only to himself, and the text reads like a dramatic monologue-- not a conversation about marital affection. According to John Dunning, the portrayal of strong emotion was also a hallmark of the plays heard on *Suspense*—yet another guideline established by William Spier: "*Suspense* featured tales of people in trouble. Human emotions were stretched to the breaking point, and the solutions were withheld until the last possible moment" (585).

If this is true, it hardly makes sense that the *Suspense* scriptwriter would have felt the need to change Poe's work from a psychological narrative into a melodramatic love story. In the text, the narrator makes statements and observations that are fraught with terror and fear. In one such moment in the story, he describes the feeling of the pendulum as it oscillates above him:

Down--steadily it crept. I took a frenzied pleasure in contrasting its downward with its lateral velocity. To the right--to the left--far and wide--with the shriek of a damned spirit! To my heart, with the stealthy pace of the tiger! I alternately laughed and howled, and the one or the other idea grew predominant. (Poe 253-54)

By reading these lines from the text, a reader would be able to comprehend the utter frustration and sheer fright caused by the narrator's circumstances. Yet, the radio play removes these lines, and countless other emotionally charged passages just like these. Ultimately, even though the common formula of *Suspense* plays dictated that the dramas would "[feature] tales of people in trouble," and would convey "human emotions ... stretched to the breaking point" (585), the writer of the *Suspense* adaptation of "The Pit and the Pendulum" adheres to that approach through his own brand of dialogue, rather than relying upon Poe's original words.

Therefore, although parts of the radio adaptation of "The Pit and the Pendulum" remain faithful to Poe's text, the differences far outweigh the similarities. In essence, although they may not seem that significant, these changes affect the overall theme of the story and thus impact Poe's intended presentation of the work. Because the *Suspense* script turns the work into a love story, "The Pit and the Pendulum" becomes a story about

the power of relationships and how love can save the day. The investigation into a man's experience with physical torture and psychological torment are lost in the shuffle.

In the article, "Evil Eye: A Motive for Murder in 'The Tell-Tale Heart,'" scholar B.D. Tucker asserts that, "Poe's tale, 'The Tell-Tale Heart,' is one of his most perfectly constructed stories, and a very skillful study of madness" (114). In essence, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is quite similar to "The Pit and the Pendulum," in that it also delves into the mind, and illustrates how an extreme circumstance-- guilt-- can influence man's mental processes.

The original text of "The Tell-Tale Heart" was penned in 1843-- just one year after "The Pit and the Pendulum." However, this tale presents a different type of psychological scenario, and asks the reader to consider how guilt, remorse, and shame might affect an individual:

'The Tell-Tale Heart' ... centers on the effects of a guilty conscience, that of the narrator, who has murdered the old man with whom he lives. Setting out to prove his sanity, this narrator, well before he story ends, convinces us that he is indeed mad ... the detailed care in planning the old man's death ... the tense buildup of the actual murder as the killer watches and listens ... all reveal the narrator's derangement (Fisher 87).

Indeed, this comment makes sense when compared to the first paragraph of the text, in which the narrator says, "How, then, am I mad? Hearken! And observe how healthily-- how calmly I can tell you the whole story" (Poe 303). In these lines, the language tells the reader that the narrator is in fact insane, evident by his vehement insistence that he is not crazy and is able to "calmly" retell the story of how he committed a murder.

From this point in the text, the narrator recounts the events leading up to the murder and tells the reader how he cunningly plotted the crime. The narrator tells the audience:

You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded--with what caution--with what foresight--with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man that during the whole week before I killed him. (303)

Here, the reader not only gathers that the narrator is certainly disturbed, and that he is guilty of the murder, but also that he takes pride in his horrible actions.

According to author Benjamin Franklin Fisher, Poe does not merely investigate the narrator's obvious derangement within "The Tell-Tale Heart," but aims to illustrate how that derangement is, in actuality, a result of the crime-- not the cause of it. Fisher asserts, "When he thinks he can hear the beating of the dead man's heart, which drives him over the brink, what our narrator actually experiences is the urgings of his own guilty conscience gone mad" (87). Furthermore, Fisher says that, because the tale focuses on sight and sound, and their impacts upon the narrator, Poe causes the reader to "focus on the human head, and, more specifically, the human mind" (87). Certainly, it is apparent that Poe's intent throughout "The Tell-Tale Heart" is to prompt a reader to consider man's mental faculties, and he achieves this by depicting a character who is racked with guilt and is eventually destroyed by the weight of his own conscience.

"The Tell-Tale Heart" was adapted for radio in the early 1940's, and just like the adaptation of "The Pit and the Pendulum," it is an adaptation that presents a drastically changed version of the original work-- a version which ultimately weakens the intent of

the text. “The Tell-Tale Heart” aired in August, 1941 on *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*. The show was a precursor to the more popular and more successful *Suspense* and was a staple on the CBS network for eleven years. Although *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* also presented stories of fear and intrigue, it differed greatly from a show like *Suspense*:

The stories were wildly improbable, usually turning on the maddest happenstances. Only on *Inner Sanctum* would a man be haunted for forty years by the wailing of his dead wife, then learn that the wailing actually came from the wind rushing through the hole in the wall where he had sealed her body. Only on *Inner Sanctum* would a man be sentenced to imprisonment after stealing a scientific formula that has made him immortal (Dunning 306).

The *Inner Sanctum* adaptation of “The Tell-Tale Heart” is a particularly interesting one, because it fulfills this description perfectly. It certainly deals heavily in the “wildly improbable” and is also rooted in “the maddest happenstances” (306). However, while the *Suspense* adaptation of Poe’s “The Pit and the Pendulum” began with an actual piece of Poe’s text quoted word for word, the *Inner Sanctum* adaptation of “The Tell-Tale Heart” provides no such link to Poe’s original words. At no point in the radio play does the narrator use even one bit of phrasing that comes directly from Poe’s work.

Alarming as this may seem, this choice apparently seems to have been made for a strategic reason, and this strong variation from the text is acknowledged in the book that accompanies the Smithsonian collection of Poe radio dramas. Author Stephanie Fitzgerald writes, “The *Inner Sanctum* adaptation offers some striking differences from Poe’s original. A faithful re-telling of the 2,000-word tale would have lasted but a

heartbeat, so producers added some new wrinkles to the story” (20). So, just what are these “new wrinkles”?

Right off the bat, the discrepancies between Poe’s text and the radio adaptation are apparent. The *Inner Sanctum* adaptation of “The Tell-Tale Heart” begins with the description of a scene that does not exist in the original story. An omniscient narrator tells the audience, “It is early evening. The sun is just setting behind a range of low hills. On top of the nearest hill is a huge, rambling building, surrounded by park-like grounds. A road winds from its gates down to the little village below” (“The Tell-Tale Heart”). Almost immediately, the radio version story seems to veer drastically away from Poe’s text: “The Tell-Tale Heart” has no setting like this, as it essentially takes place within the mind of one man.

According Vincent McInerney, this “short-cut” in exposition is a popular technique in radio writing:

[N]arration, in a certain sense, saves time, but there is another way of taking a short cut, which, though not exactly narration, saves a lot of time, dramatic energy, and dialogue. This is to have an announcer/narrator at the beginning of a play, say something along the following lines:

1. ANNOUNCER: Midnight at the laboratory of Doctor Frankenstein, maker of monsters. Geneva, 1818.

FX: WOLF HOWLS. MAN SCREAMS. MANIACAL LAUGHTER (120).

In radio writing, this is a highly calculated move, orchestrated for a particular purpose. McInerney continues, “The announcer not only introduces us to the play, but lets us know exactly where we are and what we are in for in terms of background and

content—pre-emptive subliminal plot planting” (120). Therefore, in terms of McInerney’s statements, this aspect of the radio adaptation seems to have been added in order to create a more specific context— to allow the listener to quickly understand the plot and setting of the story. In essence, however, the addition of these few expository lines at the beginning of the radio script establishes a setting that Poe never created or intended.

As the radio play continues, the audience meets the main character, Simon, who, as the listener can gather, is supposed to take the place of the speaker in Poe’s original work. Immediately, we notice a striking difference: in Poe’s original story, the narrator has no name, just as in “The Pit and the Pendulum.” In the play, Simon meets a young man named Oliver, and recounts a story about his past. He tells Oliver that he used to be a musician but inexplicably lost his hearing. Simon then visited a doctor who miraculously and mysteriously rehabilitated him, and now Simon is able to hear every single sound on earth, no matter how faint. Certainly, this is the aforementioned “wildly improbable” part of the plot, and will undoubtedly explain how Simon will be able to hear the tell-tale heartbeats later on in the story.

Oliver tells Simon that he has also been rehabilitated by the same doctor. Oliver was blind for two years, but now, has perfect, almost superhuman eyesight. Feeling that they share some incredible bond because of what they have overcome, Simon invites Oliver to stay with him for a while, and the two men retreat to Simon’s home. At this point in the drama, a reader who is familiar with the original “Tell-Tale Heart” is probably at a loss for how this adaptation remotely relates to the story. There is virtually nothing to link the two stories, save the title.

The dialogue of the adaptation seems strange as well; it has little to do with Poe's story and seems to take the listener nowhere as the drama progresses. However, it is through this dialogue that we find the most important difference in the radio adaptation, a difference that causes the intent of the work to change. As Simon and Oliver reach the house, they speak about their living conditions:

SIMON: Here we are, and it's just the way I knew it would be: quiet, peaceful, no noises- just sounds, and even those are dulled by the waterfall.

OLIVER: Yes, it's just the way I knew it would be, too: dark, dank. The home of the rats and the spiders. I'll be happy living here with them.

SIMON: Happy with rats and spiders?! Why?

OLIVER: Because they're like me- rats see in the dark, and spiders spin webs.

SIMON: I don't understand you, Oliver. Must you always see the worst, the most evil side of everything?

OLIVER: ALWAYS. ("The Tell-Tale Heart")

Here, according to the dialogue, a dichotomy is established. Oliver is indeed the misanthrope, while Simon appears to be a good-natured optimist. But how does this affect the story as a whole? The dialogue continues:

SIMON: But why? Don't you love people? Don't you think that this is a good world?

OLIVER: A good world? When I was blind for more than two years?

SIMON: Whose fault was that?

OLIVER: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE? I WAS BLIND! AND DID ANYONE CARE THAT I WAS? NO! LOVE PEOPLE? I HATE THEM!

SIMON: But Oliver, that's wrong—you've no right to hate anyone or anything!
("The Tell-Tale Heart")

Simon then pipes in with a voice-over: "It wasn't he that was blind, it was I! He is bad, evil clear through! ... And now, I have to kill him" ("The Tell-Tale Heart").

Through this dialogue, and the following voice-over, it is clear just how greatly this adaptation differs from the actual text and how these differences affect a listener's understanding of Poe's intent. In essence, the radio adaptation of this story removes all of the psychological questions, just as we have seen in the adaptation of "The Pit and the Pendulum," and only leaves the listener with questions of morality. In the radio play, Simon resolves to murder Oliver because he is a "bad person," and will do wrong to others. In the first line of "The Tell-Tale Heart," Poe hints at insanity as one of the forces behind the narrator's actions, "True!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?" (Poe 303) However, the radio play eradicates that possibility and makes the murder a heroic act, something that Poe doubtfully intended.

Therefore, the radio version of "The Tell-Tale Heart" sounds like a morality story, some sort of fable where the "good guy" wins and the "bad guy" dies. Simon kills Oliver because of something that Oliver might do in the future, not anything that he has actually done. The narrator in the radio play, then, also becomes a type of vigilante, dispensing his own brand of "justice."

In the play, Simon decides what is right and wrong, and decides that murder—if committed for the "right reason"—is, indeed, an acceptable act. He feels no guilt or remorse about the murder and is simply haunted by Oliver's heartbeats because of his

extremely sensitive hearing. In the original “Tell-Tale Heart,” the narrator is haunted by the phantom heartbeats because of his overwhelming guilt. The heartbeats serve as an audible reminder of the murder that he has committed:

My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they [the police] sat and chatted. The ringing became more distinct:—it continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definitiveness—until, at length, I found that the noise was *not* within my ears ... It grew louder—louder—louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible that they heard not? Almighty God!—no, no! They heard!—they suspected! (Poe 306).

Therefore, because Simon hears the heartbeats as a result of his heightened sense of hearing, and not as a result of guilt, the radio play turns the sound that is mentioned in the original text into a bit of science fiction—a perversity of nature—not a physical manifestation of a mental state. Even the actual sound of the tell-tale heart supports this notion: in the radio adaptation, the audience begins to hear the thumping heartbeat in the background just as the police begin to question Simon about Oliver’s disappearance. When Simon first hears the heartbeat, he dismisses it, commenting, “Oh, these ears of mine!” (“The Tell-Tale Heart”) It is clear, then, that the sound is only meant to further convey Simon’s finely tuned sense of hearing, and not meant to illustrate the guilt that he feels. Even though the inclusion of the sound of the heart certainly adds something to the overall play, it actually works in opposition to Poe’s original intent, and turns the adaptation into more of a science fiction story than a tale of terror.

Without a doubt, Poe's original story was not meant to be received in this manner, and the change in the plot begets a change in the overall presentation of the work. The radio play becomes a story of morals, while the original text serves exploration into a demented mind that is systematically destroyed by guilt.

However, just like the *Suspense* version of "The Pit and the Pendulum," the *Inner Sanctum* presentation of "The Tell-Tale Heart" adheres to the stipulations of a typical *Inner Sanctum* radio script, all the while making drastic changes to Poe's original text. John Dunning writes:

[During *Inner Sanctum* plays,] tested literary devices were used shamelessly to fool listeners. Most frequent was the trick of telling the story from the viewpoint of the killer. Sometimes the writers let [the audience] know he was the killer. Just as often they didn't, when the murderer-narrator hid his true personality behind a cloak of deceit. The writers gleefully pounced on this opportunity for ghostly manifestations ... The stories plodded on toward the inevitable scream of climax. (306)

According to this description of *Inner Sanctum*'s usual formula for radio plays, it is evident why the scriptwriters would have changed Poe's anonymous narrator into the vigilante character of Simon and why they might have changed him from a deranged man into a man who kills for the sake of justice. The *Inner Sanctum* scriptwriters tell the story from the murderer's point of view, just as Poe does in the original text; however, the adaptors use this literary device in order to support their highly moralized interpretation of "The Tell-Tale Heart." Because Simon is able to tell the audience about his reasons for

killing Oliver and explains them thoroughly and rationally, the listener is able to perceive this play as a story of right and wrong, a story about the prevention of evil.

It is interesting to consider that, while both of these adaptations certainly changed Poe's original stories in drastic ways, they adhere perfectly to the dramatic stipulations set forth by the respective radio shows for which they were crafted. As previously noted, by including a specific character name, and a slight murmur of "the inquisitorial voices," ("The Pit and the Pendulum"), the *Suspense* version of "The Pit and the Pendulum" presents a "life-or-death situation," of a man being tortured, and "through characterization and audio coloring ... heighten[s] the sensation of impending doom" (Dunning 584-85). While it undoubtedly changes Poe's story, the *Suspense* play is presented according to the guidelines of the radio show. Similarly, the *Inner Sanctum* version of "The Tell-Tale Heart" liberally adds characters, settings, and plot elements to Poe's text, but through the use of a first-person narrator, the radio play also faithfully adheres to the dramatic rules of *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that these adaptations of Poe's stories technically succeed in respect to their individual radio shows, these stories actually work to remove many solemn themes and rather grave elements from Poe's writing. The radio adaptations of "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" take Poe's original ideas and turn them into something markedly different: the stories morph from analyses of human mentality and emotion into a story of romance, and a story of good versus evil, respectively. Essentially, it can be said that the radio plays turn Poe's writing into stories that are more palatable for a general public. The adaptations become stories that teach a lesson and make a positive comment—that love conquers all, or that man is innately

good. The adaptors turn Poe's writing into these didactic tales instead of leaving them as they originally are: frightening, terrifying narratives that aim to investigate the inner workings of the human mind. With these changes, the original intentions of Poe's stories are lost and fail to reach the listener.

In addition, it is clear that the radio adaptations of these psychological texts further dilute Poe's overall intent, simply because they challenge one of Poe's most important views on composition. Within "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe states that, when crafting a work, the writer's foremost consideration should be the overall effect of the text. He states:

There is a radical error, I think, in the usual mode of constructing a story. Either history affords a thesis—or one is suggested by an incident of the day—or, at best, the author sets himself to work in the combination of striking events to form merely the basis of his narrative ... I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect*." (Poe 675-76)

He goes on to note that the effect of a text is shaped by every other element that the writer selects; the story's tone, its form (novel, short story, or poem), and most importantly, its length, all combine to achieve the intended effect.

Poe comments that the story's length—more specifically, its brevity—can truly never be overestimated, especially when considering the impact of the work as a whole. He says, "[I]t is clear that the brevity must be in direct ratio of the intensity of the intended effect ... a certain degree of duration is absolutely requisite for the production of any effect at all" (Poe 677). Here, it is clear that Poe believes that each text must have a

very specific length in order to achieve its desired effect. If the length is changed, the effect is also altered.

As previously noted, the radio adaptations of “The Pit and the Pendulum” and “The Tell-Tale Heart” augment Poe’s stories, both adding to and detracting from the original texts at will. By altering the length and structures of these stories, then, the radio adaptations further undermine the overall effects of the tales. Both of these stories take a critical look at man’s psyche; “The Pit and the Pendulum” is a story of a man being slowly tortured, while “The Tell-Tale Heart,” is essentially the hastily-recounted monologue of a guilty murderer. In essence, the length of the stories is an integral factor in the plots of both tales because it is used to highlight the mental processes of the narrators, and therefore, the However, in the radio adaptations of “The Pit and the Pendulum” and “The Tell-Tale Heart,”

In the text of “The Pit and the Pendulum,” for instance, Poe relies upon a slow, systematic method of storytelling in order to reinforce the gradual torture that the narrator experiences. The story begins as the narrator experiences several overwhelming sensory experiences. The narrator spends several paragraphs recounting what little sights he can discern and remarks that he sees candles, draperies, and mysterious angel figures. Then, several pages later, he begins to swoon, eventually faints, and then awakens to his heart beating terribly in his ears. Eventually, the narrator discusses his surroundings and remarks upon the pit, telling the audience about the size, shape, and dimensions of his prison—a cold, filthy hole, filled with rats (Poe 250).

As “The Pit and the Pendulum” progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that Poe has planned the story in a very specific way; the story unfolds just as the narrator’s

torture unfolds, and the slow buildup of the story allows the audience to experience the narrator's plight along with him. Ultimately, the length of the story supports Poe's overall intent. If the text of "The Pit and the Pendulum" were cut shorter, the reader would not necessarily understand the power of the gradual, creeping torture that the narrator experiences. Furthermore, the reader might not truly comprehend Poe's intriguing investigation of how a man responds when placed under extreme duress.

The radio adaptation of "The Pit and the Pendulum," however, toys with the established structure of Poe's original work. For over half of the twenty-nine minute radio play, the narrator, Jean, imagines conversations with his wife and simply rails against the dastardly inquisitors, hardly mentioning his prison or its effects on him. At twelve minutes into the drama, the narrator finally begins to talk about the pit in which he has been placed, but merely says a few lines about his prison:

JEAN: When I opened my eyes once again, I could see, yes, see. My prison was large and lofty, its walls formed of massive iron plates. ("The Pit and the Pendulum")

These lines hardly compare to the strength of the original work, as the narrator in Poe's story spends pages and pages describing the pit, down to the last minute detail. The radio adaptation of "The Pit and the Pendulum" possesses little of Poe's original structure; instead, we hear the narrator "speaking" to his wife for the majority of the radio play. This change, then, works to challenge Poe's original text. The length of the story is changed when the structure is changed, and therefore, Poe's story is again undermined.

The radio adaptation of "The Tell-Tale Heart" also undermines Poe's original work by changing the length of the tale. Of course, the original version of "The Tell-Tale

Heart” is only a few thousand words and is more of a dramatic monologue than an actual narrative. The radio version, however, turns the story into a drama, entirely removing the monologue aspect from the story. As Dawn B. Sova notes, “Told from the first-person point of view, the story allows the reader to see inside the mind of the madman who commits so heinous a crime. The reader, thus, sees what the narrator sees and thinks ...” (174). The original text allows the reader to step into the mind of the deranged narrator and thereby lets the reader see how the narrator’s mind has been impacted by the crime that he has committed.

As previously mentioned, the radio adaptation of “The Tell-Tale Heart” changes the story from a psychological tale to a didactic, wholesome work because the overall theme of the story is altered. In addition, it can be said that the story is also changed because the first-person narration is removed. When this occurs, the length of the story also changes, and the text again goes against Poe’s overall intent.

Essentially, because of changes in the themes as well as the lengths of “The Pit and the Pendulum” and “The Tell-Tale Heart,” both of Poe’s works are twice altered. Therefore, the audience is further removed from Poe’s original intent, and the stories become even more unlike Poe.

Although these are just two radio adaptations of Poe’s numerous stories that deal with psychological elements, both serve as interesting examples of the changes that are usually made between the page and the airwaves. The radio adaptations of Poe’s “The Pit and the Pendulum” and “The Tell-Tale Heart” also aid in analyzing the relationship between the original text and the adaptation. Many times, it appears that an adaptation will still present a relatively faithful version of a work, even if it toys with character

names, settings, or dialogue. Despite small changes such as these, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that the overall meaning or theme of the work will remain the same.

When these two plays are viewed through critical eyes, however, it is evident that they grossly deviate from Poe's actual texts, and because of this, the presentation of the stories and the perception of Poe as a writer are both changed. As Dudley Hutcherson says in "Poe's Reputation in England and America," "It has been Edgar Allan Poe's fortune—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the writer himself provided adequate insurance—that nothing connected with his name is dull, not even the story of his fame" (211). Most people with knowledge of Poe would agree that his writing is anything but boring; however, because of the way in which these radio adaptations are portrayed and the techniques that are used, Poe's stories become mundane and flat. In effect, within these radio adaptations of Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Tell-Tale Heart," Poe seems to lose his edge, the very characteristic that makes his writing so valuable and his voice so unique.

CHAPTER THREE

“KEEPING ORIGINALITY ALWAYS IN VIEW:” “METZENGERSTEIN,” METEMPSYCHOSIS, AND THE RADIO ADAPTATION OF POE’S FIRST GOTHIC TALE

The radio adaptation of Poe’s Gothic tale “Metzengerstein” offers an interesting glimpse into the merger between Poe and popular culture, as well as the more widely-discussed connection between Poe and the Gothic tradition.

Of course, there is no doubt that the bulk of Poe’s work, both poetry and prose, explores the notion of “the Gothic.” In much of his writing, Poe investigates the horrific, the macabre, the grotesque, and the uncanny, which are all hallmarks of Gothic literature. Critic Benjamin Franklin Fisher asserts that Poe chose to base so much of his writing upon these ideas because “he realized at the outset of his career that Gothicism was eminently compatible with psychological plausibility in literature” (78). As previously discussed, Poe dives into man’s psyche within several of his short stories and thereby enabling Poe to present how certain situations and circumstances strain the narrator’s mind. According to Franklin, then, it is clear that Poe’s use of Gothic elements enhanced an already prominent interest in psychology.

Therefore, Poe’s work ultimately succeeds in that it relies upon particular aspects of the Gothic tradition, using intricately designed plots, characters, and settings in order to augment the commonplace “terror tale”:

Poe’s greatest literary achievement was his renovation of the terror tale from what had been its principal intent, to entertain by means of ‘curdling the blood,’ to use a widely current phrase of the times, into what have been recognized as some of

the most sophisticated creations in psychological fiction in the English language.

(Fisher 78)

Countless scholars agree that Poe's application of Gothic elements is what makes his writing successful, essentially because the use of familiar Gothic elements makes Poe's fiction at once commonplace and unparalleled.

Poe scholar Charles E. May asserts that Poe had to establish his own method of crafting a short story in the Gothic tradition, specifically because "no theory of the short prose tale had been developed when Poe was writing" (14). Poe was forced to apply the predetermined rules of drama and poetry to his Gothic tales and thus created his own form of Gothic literature. Thus, it is undeniable that the Gothic tradition had a profound effect upon Poe, and in turn, Poe certainly had an effect upon Gothic literature.

But just how do we define this broad idea of the "Gothic," and how does it relate specifically to literature? According to David Punter and Glennis Byron, "Gothic" is not a term that can be readily defined in a few short phrases. Rather, the authors comment, "Gothic" is a notion that should be considered broadly, as it is an idea that could be explained in numerous possible ways:

Perhaps the Gothic is an entirely serious attempt to get to grips with difficulties in social organization, or in the organization of the psyche; perhaps it is a rather down-market or debased form of tragedy, akin to melodrama; perhaps it is an escapist form, in which the reader is encouraged to avoid rather than to confront fear and anxieties. Certainly different critics have espoused all of these possibilities and more. (xix)

Despite the fact that “Gothic” seems to essentially defy concrete definition, scholars do believe that Gothic literature lends itself to characterization because a number of motifs are consistently found throughout the genre. Setting, for example, could determine whether or not a work is truly “Gothic.” Benjamin Franklin Fisher states, “What finally emerged as a mainstay in Gothic works ... was an atmosphere conducive to anxieties in the protagonist and, depending on the situation in the story, among other characters in general” (75). Undoubtedly, this assertion brings to mind the various dark and foreboding settings that the reader encounters over and over again in Poe’s short fiction—settings which have a profound, often disturbing effect upon the character in question. The narrator of “The Pit and the Pendulum,” for example, wakes to find himself trapped in a dank, cramped stone pit; the climax of “The Fall of the House of Usher” occurs when the crumbling castle finally implodes upon itself, and the remnants of the Usher family are killed; and the ending of “The Cask of Amontillado” finds the antagonist entombed within the walls of some old, long forgotten catacombs.

Poe’s first published story, “Metzengerstein,” is one of the first and finest examples of Poe’s interest in and devotion to the Gothic tradition. The story was first published in 1832, and in its second printing in 1836, “Metzengerstein” was subtitled “A Tale in the Imitation of the German” (Benton 113). According to G.R. Thompson, “The subtitle would have alerted the contemporary reader that the tale was in the ‘mode’ of Gothic horror or in the fantastic ‘manner’ of German writers like Ludwig Tieck, E.T.A. Hoffman, and others ...” (81). Thus, the subtitle was not an ill-humored jab at German writing, but rather served as Poe’s way of acknowledging his interest in the type of Gothic horror that was prominent during this time.

It is easy to see just how “Metzengerstein” reflects Poe’s fascination with the Gothic tradition. “Following the conventions of the genre, the story includes dark and brooding castles, hints at secret obsessions and sins, foreboding prophecies, family rivalry, a nightmarelike atmosphere, and horrible conflagrations” (Sova 115). According to this description of “Metzengerstein,” the tale is replete with many of the customary elements of Gothic literature: a somber castle setting, an ancient curse, and a devastating fire, all of which place the story within the Gothic tradition.

However, there is a series of Gothic elements in “Metzengerstein” that takes precedence over all the rest. These three elements—a centuries-old feud, the appearance of a supernatural horse, and the notion of the transmigration of souls—combine to make “Metzengerstein” a true Gothic tale.

At the beginning of the story, the reader is introduced to two powerful Hungarian households, the Berlifitzings and the Metzengersteins. The narrator tells the audience about the longstanding rivalry between the families:

The families of Berlifitzing and Metzengerstein had been at variance for centuries. Never before were two houses so illustrious, mutually embittered by hostility so deadly. The origin of this enmity seems to be found in the words of an ancient prophecy—‘A lofty name shall have fearful fall when, as the rider over his horse, the mortality of Metzengerstein shall triumph over the immortality of Berlifitzing.’ (Poe 672)

In this part of the story, Poe presents an eerie, unsettling connection between the two families. Unlike many family quarrels seen in literature, the feud between the

Metzengersteins and the Bertlifitzings is never fully explained, and as the reader learns, the feud appears to be rooted solely in an ominous ancient decree.

Essentially, the feud between the families forms the basis for all of the events within the story. Throughout the remainder of the work, the young Baron Metzengerstein does his best to antagonize the elder Count Berlifitzing, and in the climax of the story, Berlifitzing's barn is mysteriously set on fire: "On the night of the fourth day, the stables of the Castle Berlifitzing were discovered to be on fire; and the unanimous opinion of the neighborhood added the crime of the incendiary to the already hideous list of the Baron's misdemeanors and enormities" (Poe 673). The text is unclear whether or not Metzengerstein is responsible for the setting the fire, but the narrator hints at his culpability and certainly illustrates the destructive impact of the rivalry between the two families.

As the fire blazes below, Baron Metzengerstein sits in his room and looks closely at a tapestry that depicts a struggle between the families (Sova 116). "[H]is eyes are drawn to an enormous and unnaturally colored horse that belonged to an ancestor of his rival. Metzengerstein looks away, and when his gaze returns to the tapestry he sees that the head of the gigantic horse appears to have moved ..." (116). At this point in the story, Metzengerstein searches the tapestry in order to discern how the depiction of the horse has changed. "To his extreme horror and astonishment, the head of the gigantic steed had, in the meantime, altered its position. The neck of the animal, before arched, as if in compassion, over the prostrate body of its lord, was now extended, at full length, in the direction of the Baron" (Poe 674). Metzengerstein then notices that the horse's eyes have changed as well: "The eyes, before invisible, now wore an energetic and human

expression, while they gleamed with a fiery and unusual red ..." (674). In this moment, the reader is introduced to the second Gothic element in this vital series of events—the appearance of a supernatural, devilish, and seemingly possessed horse, which has apparently come to life in some mysterious manner.

Almost immediately after Metzengerstein notices that the horse has moved, he runs outside alarmed and unnerved, hoping to "lighten the depression of his spirits" (Poe 674). However, what Metzengerstein finds outside the castle shocks him even more: "At the principal gate of the palace he encountered three equerries. With much difficulty, and at the imminent peril of their lives, they were restraining the convulsive plunges of a gigantic and fiery-colored horse" (675). Metzengerstein wastes no time in piecing the puzzle together, and the narrator comments that "he became instantly aware that the mysterious steed in the tapestried chamber was the very counterpart of the furious animal before his eyes" (675). He knows that the horse before him is the physical incarnation of the horse from the tapestry, and he is eager to take the horse into his care.

Of course it is no coincidence that the horse from the tapestry has come to life at this exact moment in the story. As Metzengerstein examines his new "fiery-colored" steed (675), one of his servants tells him that Berlifitzing perished in the barn fire only a few minutes before, while futilely trying to save his horses from the blaze. Here, Poe ominously equates the mysterious horse with Metzengerstein's recently-dead rival, Berlifitzing, and proposes that the Count's soul has somehow entered the horse's body.

To further this idea in the reader's mind, one of Metzengerstein's servants inspects the strange animal and cries, "The letters W.V.B. are also branded very distinctly on [the horse's] forehead. I supposed them, of course, to be the initials of

William Von Berlifitzing ...” (675). However, the servant continues, no member of Berlifitzing’s household has any knowledge of the horse—it is as if the horse has appeared from nowhere, at the precise instant of Count Berlifitzing’s death.

Poe never explicitly states that the fiery horse is in fact Count Berlifitzing, but the implication is certainly apparent. According to critic Dawn B. Sova, this insinuation of a soul-exchange between a man and an animal is one of the most significant aspects of “Metzengerstein.” In essence, this third element in a series of Gothic ingredients serves as Poe’s own notable addition to the Gothic literature genre: “Poe’s contribution to this standard fare is the introduction of an unusual phenomenon, the psychic transmigration of a soul from a human to a horse” (115). Poe refers to this event as “metempsychosis,” and the narrator of “Metzengerstein” alludes to its existence in the first few lines of the story, stating, “[A]t the period of which I speak, there existed, in the interior of Hungary, a settled although hidden belief in the doctrines of Metempsychosis. Of the doctrines themselves-- that is, of their falsity, or of their probability-- I say nothing” (Poe 672). In these lines, the narrator only slightly mentions the idea of the transmigration of souls. Apparently in his time, this belief is widely-acknowledged, but is not formally discussed for reasons that he does not mention. The narrator ultimately refuses to discuss the veracity of metempsychosis, yet it is important enough for him to plant the idea in the reader’s mind at the beginning of the story. In doing so, the narrator implies that metempsychosis is in fact real and that the remainder of “Metzengerstein” will be devoted to proving its existence.

From the opening of “Metzengerstein” to the end of the text, it is clear that Poe couples a metaphysical theory with a strong series of Gothic images in order to explore

the human soul. In the article “Poe’s Materialist Metaphysics of Man,” Kenneth Alan Hovey asserts that because of Poe’s interest in man’s psyche, he eventually became interested in the soul, and therefore, “naturally considered the further metaphysical question of whether the soul is separable from the body and hence capable of life apart from it” (356). “Metzengerstein” is essentially a story that investigates—via Gothic elements—the superstitious beliefs and metaphysical theories that surround the soul of man.

According to author Stephanie Fitzgerald, this very fact is what made “Metzengerstein” a perfect selection for radio adaptation. The story’s exploration into the supernatural, coupled with its theme of twisted revenge, appealed to the writers of *Columbia Workshop*, and the story was adapted for the program on December 16, 1937. Fitzgerald acknowledges, however, that the story went through some major changes between the page and the airwaves, mostly due to the brevity of Poe’s original text:

As written, the tale is rather short. So, as in other cases, the radio adaptation varies a bit from the original text. The important pieces are all there, though: the feud between the Metzengersteins and the Berlifitzings, an ominous prophecy, an ancient tapestry and that horrible horse. All in all, ‘Metzengerstein’ is a compelling Gothic tale of revenge from beyond the grave-- making it a natural choice for the minds at *Columbia Workshop*. (26)

This evaluation of the *Columbia Workshop* version of “Metzengerstein” is interesting, as it focuses on how the radio adaptation of Poe’s story is relatively faithful to the text, possibly more so than other radio adaptations of Poe’s work at this time. Despite some changes to the story, all of the “important pieces” (26) of the original

“Metzengerstein” are included in the radio play, according to Fitzgerald. The listener should expect to encounter the same basic plot elements: the feud, the tapestry, and of course, the mysterious horse; therefore, it is reasonable to assume that despite a few slight variations from the original, the *Columbia Workshop* version of “Metzengerstein” will remain mostly true to the plot as well as the intent of Poe’s original text.

During America’s Golden Age of Radio, *Columbia Workshop* was a revolutionary program fueled by innovative writers, contributors, and directors. The show aired on CBS from 1936 until early 1942, and when World War II began, the series went on hiatus. It resumed four years later in February, 1946 (Wylie 40). *Columbia Workshop* differed greatly from the other drama series of the time, simply because of its unique collaborative format. Radio historian Max Wylie comments, “Here was something the entire staff, writers and editors alike, worked on. Indeed the whole Columbia organization interested itself in the Workshop...” (40-41). The large staff worked together on adaptations of well-known works like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, as well as completely original scripts from other radio writers (Haendiges 1).

However, *Columbia Workshop* did not limit itself to only producing scripts by professional writers. Wylie notes that the program also “received suggestions and scripts from directors, executives, engineers, sound-effects men, bookkeepers, publicists, and others not directly or regularly concerned with programs” (41). This interesting technique had never been employed by any previous radio program, as most shows of the time period relied solely on a small, fixed group of writers to create scripts for each episode. Despite the unorthodox method of production, each *Columbia Workshop* script received

the same communal treatment, and the show maintained this unique process throughout its time on the air.

Columbia Workshop also experimented with the format of the shows that were produced. Each individual script presented on *Columbia Workshop* varied greatly from one another, and no two episodes followed the same format for one very simple reason: there was no prescribed layout. This aspect of *Columbia Workshop* made the show inviting and welcoming to professional and amateur writers alike:

The appeal of the Workshop was obvious. Here, for once, the writer or the man with a burning idea escaped ‘format.’ There was no format within the Workshop. Every script was different and selected for that reason. It was experimental, off the beaten path; it was radio playing with its own tools and chuckling appreciatively at the process. On-staff or off-staff, the Workshop was wide open.

(Wylie 41)

In essence, the experimental nature of the show made *Columbia Workshop* an incredibly popular series. Creativity was allowed and encouraged, and the show ultimately benefited from that fact.

The *Columbia Workshop* version of “Metzengerstein” was one of the series’ earliest plays. Interestingly enough, it is a relatively sparse production: there is no continuous narration, few sound effects save for one important one, and very little exposition, which is noteworthy considering the “experimental” nature of the series. At the beginning of the play, a single voice provides a mere three sentences to set up the story for the listener:

Rain-- drenching, blinding, chilling rain. It beats on the windows, creeps under the doors, and hisses as it finds its way down the chimney, and falls on the logs that blaze in the great fireplace in the hall of the castle of Metzengerstein. Two vassals of Baron Metzengerstein, are standing with their backs to the roaring fire.

(“Metzengerstein”)

Right away, the radio play presents the listener with a gloomy scene. These expository lines are further supported by the only continual sound effect that is used throughout the drama—the incessant sound of drumming rain. Certainly, the calculated combination of these rather dismal lines and the ominous sound of steady rainfall have a profound effect on the listener. These elements give the story a chilling, Gothic tinge within the first thirty seconds of the radio play, and the listener immediately gathers that the drama is not a lighthearted, cheerful comedy.

As the play advances, it is clear that the aforementioned evaluation of the radio version of “Metzengerstein” is correct; the play indeed retains the most important elements of the original story, and the plot is relatively close to Poe’s text. At two minutes into the drama, the listener is introduced to the feud between the Metzengersteins and the Berlifitzings. Two of Metzengerstein’s servants discuss the origins of the mysterious rivalry:

SERVANT 1: I wonder why they [the families] hate each other so.

SERVANT 2: Oh, for the same reason that their fathers hated each other, and their fathers, and their fathers, and their fathers’ fathers before them.

SERVANT 1: And why was that?

SERVANT 2: I doubt if even the Baron or the Count could tell you. It's a feud that's so old that no one even remembers when it started or what caused it.

("Metzengerstein")

By presenting this exchange towards the start of the drama, the radio writers convey to the listener that feud between the two families is an incredibly vital aspect of the story. Even though neither household remembers how the feud began, it is what apparently governs their lives, and is more than likely the foundation for all that is about to transpire within the play. The servants continue to discuss the families, and both men muse about the root of the ancient dispute. Here, the tapestry from Poe's original story makes an appearance:

SERVANT 2: Some say that that old tapestry up there pictures the scene of the beginning of the feud. It's very lifelike, isn't it?

SERVANT 1: Who's the fellow with the sword?

SERVANT 2: Oh, one of our Baron Metzengerstein's ancestors.

SERVANT 1: And the murdered man on the ground?

SERVANT 2: Someone from the house of Berlifitzing.

SERVANT 1: That's a fine horse. That needlewoman certainly knew her business. It looks as if it could step right off that cloth. See how his nostrils are dilated, that wild look in his eyes.

SERVANT 2: Yes, it's a fine piece of work, all right. ("Metzengerstein")

In these lines, it is apparent that the radio version of "Metzengerstein" follows Poe's original story in several distinct ways. In the first two minutes of the *Columbia Workshop* play, the listener is privy to the same information that Poe conveys within the

beginning of the original “Metzengerstein.” The listener is told that the feud between the Metzengersteins and the Berlifitzings is deeply rooted in the past, a piece of information that echoes part of Poe’s text, in which the narrator states, “The families of Berlifitzing and Metzengerstein had been at variance for centuries” (Poe 672). The listener also gathers that the mysterious tapestry is a significant part of the longstanding disagreement because it depicts an old, almost primitive battle between ancestors of the two families.

On a purely superficial level, these facets of the *Columbia Workshop* version of “Metzengerstein” not only appear reflect the original plot of Poe’s text, but they also seem to adhere to the intent of Poe’s original work. As previously mentioned, Poe intended “Metzengerstein” to be an exploration of the Gothic tradition and a tribute to the German masters of the genre. By keeping some of these important Gothic plot elements, the *Columbia Workshop* version of “Metzengerstein” gives the impression of remaining true to this goal.

However, when one considers the radio version of “Metzengerstein” on a deeper level, it is clear that the adaptation actually undermines Poe’s overall intent. This occurs because the play ultimately fails to include an essential aspect of the original text— the theory of metempsychosis and the transmigration of souls between Berlifitzing and the horse. Although the terrifying, spectral horse figure is included within the *Columbia Workshop* version of “Metzengerstein,” the scriptwriters do not fully explore the metaphysical theory behind its appearance. In essence, the horse does not function in the way Poe originally planned, and therefore, it does not adequately fulfill the purpose for which it was intended.

The text of “Metzengerstein” first and foremost uses the theory of metempsychosis to advance the action in the story. Poe’s narrator mentions metempsychosis at the onset of the work and refers to it steadily throughout, conveying that it will profoundly affect the outcome of the tale. As the story progresses, Poe relies on metempsychosis in order to account for the peculiar arrival of the “fiery-colored horse” (Poe 675). At the moment Metzengerstein lays eyes on the horse, he somehow instinctively knows that it is Berlifitzing in animal form, because, according to the narrator, the belief in metempsychosis abounds throughout Hungarian society (672). Metzengerstein believes in the transmigration of souls, and this fact explains why he is excited—not alarmed—when he comes into contact with the supernatural form of his deceased rival.

Poe then furthers the importance of metempsychosis by using it to justify the next step in the plot—Metzengerstein’s wholly unnatural attachment to the horse: Indeed, the Baron’s perverse attachment to his lately-acquired charger—an attachment which seemed to attain new strength from every fresh example of the animal’s ferocious and demon-like propensities—at length became, in the eyes of all reasonable men, a hideous and unnatural fervor. In the glare of noon—at the dead hour of night—in sickness or in health—in calm or in tempest—the young Metzengerstein seemed riveted to the saddle of that colossal horse, whose intractable audacities so well accorded with his own spirit. (Poe 677)

Certainly, Metzengerstein delights in the knowledge that he now “owns” Berlifitzing, and therefore becomes all but wedded to the horse, evident in Poe’s telling use of the phrase “in sickness or in health” (Thompson 87). The horse becomes an

extension of Metzengerstein, and Metzengerstein comes to treat the horse almost like a woman: “Among all the retinue of the Baron, however, none were found to doubt the ardor of that extraordinary affection which existed on the part of the young nobleman for the fiery qualities of his horse ...” (Poe 677). In Poe’s text, the young Metzengerstein and the horse become virtually inseparable simply because Metzengerstein thrills at the thought of possessing his former adversary.

Finally, Poe uses metempsychosis in order to explain how Berlifitzing is able to exact revenge on Metzengerstein at the end of the tale. Although Metzengerstein feels that he now controls Berlifitzing in horse form, Berlifitzing actually ends up overpowering him—fatally. In the last moments of the story, Metzengerstein rides away from his castle on the back of the mysterious horse, but the ride soon sets a string of deadly events into motion. The narrator observes that “after some hours [of Metzengerstein’s] absence ... the battlements of the Palace Metzengerstein were discovered crackling ... under the influence of a dense and livid mass of ungovernable fire” (Poe 678). This fire obviously echoes the fire allegedly set by Metzengerstein at the beginning of the story, the fire that ultimately claimed Berlifitzing’s life. By linking these two events in the story, Poe implies that Berlifitzing will now cause Metzengerstein’s death in some strange, otherworldly manner.

Soon after the inexplicable fire is set, Metzengerstein’s servants observe a startling event: “Up the long avenue of aged oaks which led from the forest to the main entrance of the Palace Metzengerstein, a steed, bearing an un-bonneted and disordered rider, was seen leaping with an impetuosity which outstripped the very Demon of the Tempest” (678). Metzengerstein and the horse fly wildly across the castle grounds, and

the narrator is shocked to see “the agony of [Metzengerstein’s] countenance, the convulsive struggle of his frame” as the horse bucks and flails dangerously (678). The narrator describes the rider’s horror, commenting that “his lacerated lips ... were bitten through and through in the intensity of terror” (678), and only one terrifying scream comes out of Metzengerstein’s mouth as he struggles in vain to free himself from the horse’s back.

The fight between the horse and the rider—between Berlifitzing and Metzengerstein—finally ends as the possessed horse jumps into the horrible fire, with the young Baron still clutching to his back. The narrator states, “One instant, and the clattering of hoofs resounded sharply and shrilly above the roaring of the flames ... the steed bounded far up the tottering staircases of the palace, and, with its rider, disappeared amid the whirlwind of chaotic fire” (Poe 678). Through this final act, Berlifitzing has succeeded in avenging his death and has found revenge against the young Metzengerstein, who foolishly thought he could dominate his rival.

All of this, of course, is plausible because Poe has artfully presented the idea of metempsychosis throughout the tale. Without the presence of this theory, the tale would be little more than a ghost story and certainly would not fall within the realm of Gothic literature.

The *Columbia Workshop* version of “Metzengerstein” makes no mention any of these parts of the story, as it ultimately removes any implication of the transmigration of souls. In the text, Poe sees fit to introduce metempsychosis immediately, in order to plant the seed in the reader’s mind as soon as possible. The radio adaptation of “Metzengerstein,” however, never mentions transmigration or metempsychosis, and the

fatal connection between Metzengerstein and the horse is not even suggested until the very end of the program. Thus, the end of the story is drastically changed.

Three minutes before the episode ends, Metzengerstein is informed of Berlifitzing's death. In a fit of rage, Berlifitzing's daughter—a new character created especially for the play—purposefully sets the Metzengerstein palace ablaze:

DAUGHTER (to Metzengerstein): You spoke of the curse that went with the tapestry that hangs on your wall.

METZENGERSTEIN: Yes; are you trying to frighten me with such rot?

DAUGHTER: I can prophesy, Baron Frederick. I can look into the future and tell you that the palace of Metzengerstein, yes, and YOU shall be destroyed!

METZENGERSTEIN: Really? Perhaps you can tell me ... how.

DAUGHTER: In this manner ... ("Metzengerstein")

Berlifitzing's daughter then walks over to the ancient tapestry and threatens to set it on fire. Metzengerstein cries out:

METZENGERSTEIN: Put down that lamp!

DAUGHTER: That tapestry has hung there for two hundred years; it's as dry as tinder ...

METZENGERSTEIN: Put down that lamp!

DAUGHTER: Flames will leap from those draperies to the hangings, from those hangings to the beams, from the beams to the whole palace of Metzengerstein! Do you suppose that my prophecy would come true if I should throw this lamp?!

METZENGERSTEIN: Put down that lamp!

DAUGHTER: Let's find out, Baron! ("Metzengerstein")

Berlitzing's daughter then ignites the ancient cloth of the tapestry, and Metzengerstein frantically runs outside in order to escape the blaze. Only after this event does Metzengerstein come into contact with the horse, for the first and only time in the radio adaptation:

SERVANT: Baron Frederick, Baron Frederick!

METZENGERSTEIN: Yes, what is it?

SERVANT: Look, here by the gate!

METZENGERSTEIN: What are you talking about?!

SERVANT: It's a horse, bridled and saddled!

METZENGERSTEIN: Well, what of that?

SERVANT: Where did it come from?

METZENGERSTEIN: It was probably frightened by the flames that came from our stable. ("Metzengerstein")

At this point in the radio drama, it is clear that Metzengerstein has no particular interest in the horse and merely believes it to be a stray that has roamed away from the barn. This is a key discrepancy between the original text and the radio adaptation. In Poe's original story, Metzengerstein immediately realizes that the horse is Berlitzing reincarnated. Within the drama, however, Metzengerstein's servant suggests that the horse before them is an incarnation of the horse from the tapestry, yet Metzengerstein dismisses this notion:

SERVANT: A horse of this size never occupied one of our stalls! It's a mammoth beast, and its eyes stare at one like the eyes of that horse in the tapestry that hung in the great hall! Perhaps ...

METZENGERSTEIN: Perhaps what?

SERVANT: Perhaps it's the same animal come to life!

METZENGERSTEIN: Oh, you superstitious fool; how could it be?! That horse was nothing but thread, and this one is made of flesh! Go back to the fire, you fool! It must be a horse that escaped from the burning stable! ("Metzengerstein")

Metzengerstein then quickly mounts the horse in order to ride it back towards the castle, but the horse has other ideas. As in Poe's original text, the horse bounds over the castle walls and into the blaze:

SERVANT 1: The horse is racing up the stairs of the burning palace! STOP! STOP, FREDERICK, STOP!

SERVANT 2: I can't look! What has happened?

SERVANT 1: They've both disappeared into the flames! ("Metzengerstein")

This part of the *Columbia Workshop* version of "Metzengerstein" is noteworthy for a couple of reasons. For one, all of the dialogue occurs within the miniscule span of two minutes, which makes ending of the drama sound rushed, forced, and altogether unconvincing. Furthermore, by this point in the radio play, it is abundantly clear that Poe's theory of metempsychosis will not play a part in the overall plot. The original text alludes to metempsychosis over and over again, but the radio drama does not mention it a single time, thereby changing the effect of the ending. Because the theme of metempsychosis is removed from the radio version of "Metzengerstein," the main character's death at the end of the play sounds more like an accident and not what Poe intended it to be—a terrifying instance of revenge from beyond the grave.

In essence, the *Columbia Workshop* adaptation of “Metzengerstein” is mostly true to Poe’s work; however, the adaptation is unable to sufficiently reflect the intent of the original text. By removing the theme of metempsychosis, the radio version of “Metzengerstein” neglects Poe’s ground-breaking addition to Gothic literature. Poe’s story is presented as a typical Gothic story which only mirrors the commonplace “terror tale,” and does not add anything new to the genre. Critics agree that “Metzengerstein” worked well for Poe’s career as a Gothic writer, as it established his passionate and serious interest in augmenting the Gothic genre, and not simply just imitating it.

According to “The Philosophy of Composition,” Poe holds that, as a writer, he constantly strives to be mindful of originality when choosing a subject or constructing a plot. This notion makes sense when considering that Poe wished to add something new to the Gothic genre in writing “Metzengerstein.” In the essay, Poe states, “Keeping originality *always* in view ... I say to myself, in the first place, ‘Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?’” (676). When creating a specific effect, Poe believes that originality is key. As previously noted, Poe strove to add something new and original to the Gothic genre. He was certainly aware of the Gothic tradition while writing “Metzengerstein,” but he wanted to create more than just a simple imitation of a Gothic story.

Kenneth Silverman notes that “Poe drew on a widely popular tradition of Gothic fiction. By the time he began treating the Gothic world in ‘Metzengerstein,’ it had been a staple of British, American, and Continental writing for more than half a century” (111-12). Undoubtedly, Poe earnestly strove to become a master of the Gothic genre by adding

his own unique view to the field. Scholar Richard P. Benton supports this fact, asserting that in writing “Metzengerstein,” “Poe meant to show that he could write a terror tale as good as the German tales admired by his contemporaries” (113). He wanted his public to see him in the same light as the German masters of Gothic literature, and therefore, added his own unique element to the Gothic tradition—the theory of metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls.

In effect, the *Columbia Workshop* adaptation of “Metzengerstein” removes this singular aspect from Poe’s work, and the listener is not privy to the element that makes the story unique to Poe. Instead, the audience is presented with a standard Gothic terror tale—nothing new, nothing experimental like Poe originally intended. In effect, it seems that perhaps Poe’s theory of metempsychosis was just too much for a radio audiences during this time. The *Columbia Workshop* writers made sure to include relatively benign Gothic elements like the family feud and the dark, gloomy castle, and even added the sound of steady rain in the background in order to emphasize the foreboding nature of the tale. However, the theory of metempsychosis is suspiciously left out. Perhaps during the 1930’s, the notion of the transmigration of souls was viewed as a movement into the occult, something which the writers did not want to impart to an audience. Apparently, the other dark elements of “Metzengerstein” were seen as integral to the entertainment value of the program, yet the notion metempsychosis was viewed as too scary or too sinister to include in the story. Even though this element is the most important aspect of Poe’s original work, it is effectively removed from the radio adaptation.

Because of the changes made, then, the radio drama removes Poe’s originality, and therefore, the listener is unable to grasp the idea that Poe is adding to a tradition in

order to make it his own. The audience merely gathers that Poe is only imitating the Gothic masters before him. Here again, the listener is introduced to a radio adaptation of Poe's work that keeps some of the story's original qualities, but ultimately loses that which is exclusively "Poe."

CHAPTER FOUR

“SOME AMOUNT OF COMPLEXITY, SOME AMOUNT OF SUGGESTIVENESS”: THE RADIO ADAPTATION OF “THE PURLOINED LETTER” AND ITS EFFECTS ON POE’S DETECTIVE FICTION

Critics have drawn a wide range of conclusions regarding Poe’s trilogy of detective stories. Practically every possible facet of the trilogy—“The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” and “The Purloined Letter”—has been scrutinized, and innumerable theories about each story abound. For instance, Shawn Rosenheim holds that Poe’s detective fiction presents the reader with a handful of distinct methods of analysis, and that each story examines the overall techniques used to arrive at a logical conclusion (74). Jan Whitt, however, asserts that the detective stories do not only depend on scientific reasoning, noting that Poe also illustrates how emotion and heartfelt intuition play a part in solving problems (59). Some critics take this notion a step further and compare Poe’s techniques of detection to those of other writers in the genre.

Interestingly, a select group of scholars have argued for more character-centric readings of Poe’s detective stories, believing that the mental capabilities and overall efficacy of Poe’s fictional sleuth, C. Auguste Dupin, are the most important parts of the stories. In the article “Poe’s Dupin and the Power of Detection,” Peter Thoms states that Poe’s detective fiction was and is still popular because the stories foster an “intense engagement with the text where, in the scrutinizing of evidence and the interpreting of clues, the reader becomes a detective and the detective a reader” (133). In Thoms’s view, the reader follows Dupin’s train of thought as he explains the case presented in the work. “Moreover,” Thoms notes, “a detective like Dupin also becomes an author, who

figuratively writes the hidden story of the crime” (133). According to Thoms, Dupin functions as both creator and revealer in the stories, fashioning the actual timeline of the various crimes while simultaneously imparting the information to the audience. Therefore, Poe’s intelligent sleuth is important to the stories not only for his literal skills of detection, but also for the figurative role that he plays in the reader’s understanding of the overall narrative.

In the last story in Poe’s detective trilogy, “The Purloined Letter,” it is particularly obvious just how Dupin’s role in the tale affects the overall understanding of the work. “The Purloined Letter,” written in 1844, is a mystery tale that is on the whole much more cerebral than the other tales in the detective trilogy. This occurs because “‘The Purloined Letter’ uses deductive reasoning rather than horror as the narrative tool” (Sova 153). At the beginning of the tale, the Prefect of the Paris police visits Dupin and his unnamed associate. The Prefect tells the two men about a mysterious case involving the royal family and a stolen letter. He states:

‘Well, then; I have received personal information, from a very high quarter, that a certain document of the last importance has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known; this is beyond a doubt; he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession.’ (Poe 209)

The Prefect makes it clear to Dupin that he and the Parisian police know that the letter itself contains very sensitive, secretive information, and that it is of the utmost importance that they retrieve the letter as soon as possible.

In addition to this fact, the Prefect conveys to Dupin that he and the police also know, without a doubt, who stole the letter. Within the first few paragraphs of the text, the Prefect actually names the thief, telling Dupin, “‘The thief . . . is the Minister D—, who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as becoming a man’” (Poe 209). At this point, Poe subverts the usual, accepted arrangement of the detective story. Most detective tales do not begin with the naming of the criminal; a reader is usually compelled to finish the story in order to discover the culprit’s identity. “The Purloined Letter,” however, toys with this customary practice.

Critic Dawn B. Sova comments that “The Purloined Letter” is especially notable for this aspect. Sova notes that it “is not [a story] of strict detection because the identity of the criminal is known” (153). In the story, the Prefect tells Dupin that the culprit stole the letter from the Queen in plain sight. The Queen actually observed his malicious action, and therefore, knows that the Minister is in possession of the letter in question. Thus, the reader is not surprised to learn that the police are investigating the thief, the “Minister D—” (Poe 209). Nevertheless, the story still surprises the reader for another reason altogether: “What does amaze the reader, however, is that the Paris police cannot find the letter, even though they use the most sophisticated and exhaustive methods of searching for it . . .” (Sova 153). As the reader learns, the Prefect and the police have been unable to locate the letter, even though they have already correctly identified the guilty party.

Therefore, even though one key component of the mystery has been verified, a fundamental question still remains. Just how has the Minister been able to conceal the letter, especially when the police have conducted an extensive search of his home? The

Prefect tells Dupin, “My first care was to make a thorough search of the minister’s hotel ... For three months, a night has not passed during the greater part of which I have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking the D— Hotel” (Poe 210-11). If the Prefect has searched the Minister’s hotel consistently for the past three months, why has he yet to retrieve the stolen item? Essentially, when the Prefect literally presents this question to Dupin—after all, this is the reason the Prefect has called upon the sleuth—the text figuratively poses the same question to the reader. As the story then unfolds, it becomes clear that Dupin will have to use his methods of detection in order to determine how the stolen letter has been hidden, instead of using them in the more conventional sense: to discern the culprit in the case.

By this point in “The Purloined Letter,” Poe has clearly established that which the reader hopes to find: a well-defined narrative path that will aid in navigating the remainder of the story. In essence, it can be said that any given reader wishes to engage with a text in a complete manner; one trusts that, no matter how a story is written, it will at some point include the three most basic elements of a narrative: a beginning, middle, and end. Peter Thoms asserts that a reader of detective fiction certainly desires an overall linear understanding of the story, and often, the reader is “[compelled] to look backward ... for the narrative’s beginnings” (135). Of course, this is the type of reading forced upon the audience of “The Purloined Letter,” as the story demands that the reader follow along with Dupin’s train of thought as he reconstructs past events.

Thoms goes on to comment upon this aspect of detective fiction, examining why a reader would respond to it in such a way:

Perhaps more dramatically than most narratives, detective fiction exploits the anxiety inherent in the most basic human question: Why am I where I am? In the narrative formula Poe develops, the writer begins by disorienting the reader, fanning our uncertainty and fear ... and then proceeds to soothe our distress by locating the subject or subjects in an explanatory context. (135)

According to Thoms, Poe's detective stories essentially present the reader with much more than just petty crime, shadowy figures, horrific murders, and shifty motives. The true importance of Poe's detective stories lies in the other elements within the tales.

By looking closely at the overarching plots and the reasoning Dupin uses to explain the crimes, it is clear that Poe's stories are more about the detective and less about the crimes and/or culprits themselves: "Usually the reader of detective fiction seeks to uncover the intention behind the crime, but this switching ... from ostensible criminal to detective suggests that the real mystery lies elsewhere and that we should examine the act of investigation itself" (Thoms 137). In effect, Poe's Dupin is directly responsible for explaining the story's events, as it is his detection which propels both the secondary characters and the audience toward the same understanding at the end of the tale.

This fact is certainly clear as "The Purloined Letter" progresses. After the Prefect tells Dupin about his frustration in searching for the stolen item, Dupin agrees to provide assistance. He tells the Prefect to search the Minister's home yet again, and then sends the Prefect on his way. One month later, the Prefect returns to Dupin's office, irritated because he still has not found the letter. The Prefect tells Dupin, "[Y]es; I made the re-examination. However ... it was all labor lost, as I knew it would be'" (Poe 213). All

attempts at implicating the Minister have failed because the Parisian police simply cannot locate the stolen article, and the Prefect openly laments this disappointment.

Dupin then slyly inquires about the amount of the reward offered in the event of the letter's return, to which the Prefect responds, "Why, a very great deal—a very liberal reward—I don't like to say how much, precisely; but one thing I will say, that I wouldn't mind giving my individual check for fifty thousand francs to any one who could obtain me that letter'" (Poe 213). After a few moments of discussion with Dupin, the Prefect reinforces this notion, commenting that he "really would give fifty thousand francs to any one who would aid ... in the matter'" (214). At this point, Dupin declares his formal acceptance of the reward: he has successfully located the purloined letter.

As the astonished Prefect presents a check for the specified amount, Dupin casually produces the stolen letter. Dupin's unnamed associate—the narrator of the story—comments upon the scene:

[The Prefect] seized a pen, and after several pauses and vacant stares, finally filled up and signed a check for fifty thousand francs, and handed it across the table to Dupin. The latter examined it carefully and deposited it in his pocket-book; then, unlocking an escritoire, took thence a letter and gave it to the Prefect.

(214)

Of course, at this moment in the story, both the reader and the characters are astounded to discover that Dupin has been able to procure the stolen letter. After all, there has been little action in the story thus far, and there certainly has been no mention of Dupin's success in solving the case. At this point in the tale, Dupin presents the letter to the Prefect and collects the reward, as his associate sits dumbfounded, awaiting an

explanation. The reader, too, is poised at this moment in the narrative, waiting for Dupin to clarify just how he succeeded in uncovering the precious item.

Instead of merely recounting a detailed timeline of the events which led to finding the letter, Dupin initiates a more abstract discussion with his associate. He steps back into the beginning of the crime and moves through the case methodically, explaining how his more thorough reasoning differs from the Prefect's rather amateur logic. As the reader gathers, it is this difference in thinking which leads Dupin—and not the Prefect—to the letter. Dupin comments, ““A certain set of highly ingenious resources are, with the Prefect, a sort of Procrustean bed, to which he forcibly adapts his designs”” (Poe 215). As Dupin notes, the Prefect has a relatively decent way of thinking and reasoning his way through cases; he is by no means a simpleton or an ineffectual policeman. However, it is clear that Dupin believes that the Prefect's thinking is ultimately limited. Dupin continues to muse on this notion, stating that the Prefect's mistake lies in the fact that ““he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow for the matter in hand; and many a school boy is a better reasoner than he”” (Poe 215). In Dupin's mind, the Prefect cannot adequately solve certain cases simply because he either looks too closely at the evidence, or because he does not look closely enough.

Dupin's view of the case and the facts at hand is quite different, and he explains his method of interpretation to his associate by way of analyzing a deceptively simple game of marbles. He explains the rules, telling his associate, ““One player holds in his hand a number of these toys, and demands of another whether that number is even or odd. If the guess is right, the guesser wins one; if wrong, he loses one”” (Poe 215). Dupin then mentions a young schoolboy who had vast success at this guessing game. This particular

boy “won all the marbles of the school” merely because he “had some principle of guessing; and this lay in the mere observation and ad-measurement of the astuteness of his opponents” (Poe 215). Essentially, as Dupin conveys, the young boy succeeded at a game which, on the surface, appears to be governed by chance. In order to overcome this randomness, the boy applied logic to a seemingly illogical game and devised a sound method of guessing: he considered his opponents’ intellect before estimating the amount of marbles in their hands.

This theory leads Dupin into a scathing analysis of the Prefect and his method of detection. He again notes that “... the Prefect and his cohort fail so frequently ... by ill ad-measurement, or rather through non-ad-measurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged” (Poe 216). The Prefect only thinks as himself and does not put himself in the criminal’s shoes, a mistake which radically alters the progress made within a given case. Dupin furthers this notion, stating that “[The Prefect and the police] consider only their *own* ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for any thing hidden, advert only to the modes in which *they* would have hidden it” (216). In short, the Prefect fails to think like the culprit, and therefore, his reasoning perpetually remains one step behind the criminal’s.

Of course, the fact that Dupin apparently abhors this immature method of reasoning tells the reader a great deal about Dupin’s sleuthing abilities. The reader initially gathers that Dupin has employed some other method of logic in order to find the purloined letter. He even goes so far as to declare his extreme hatred for this surface-level type of detection, stating, “I dispute the availability, and thus the value, of that reason which is cultivated in any especial form other than the abstractly logical” (Poe 217).

Therefore, we rightly assume that Dupin has been able to locate the stolen item because he has successfully utilized an “abstractly logical” mode of detection. He has aligned his manner of thinking with the Minister’s manner of thinking—which, in his view, is the *only* correct way of detection.

Poe makes use of this theory of detection in “The Purloined Letter” in order to investigate the overall idea of logic, particularly as it reflects and/or relates to human nature. Dawn B. Sova observes that within the tale, “Dupin’s reasoning is based on three factors: what he knows of the Prefect’s behavior and thought processes, what he knows of the Minister’s behavior and thought processes, and what he knows of human nature in general” (153). Dupin immediately realizes that the Prefect is an intelligent man and a good policeman, albeit one who relies upon a detrimentally fixed mode of deduction. Dupin also knows that the Minister is an ingenious figure. Using this fact, Dupin reasons that the Minister is sharp, and therefore, he is “aware that the police have secretly searched his home and that the police would rely on tried-and-true search methods” (153). Thus, Dupin knows that the Minister has managed to stay one step ahead of the police, successfully eluding their endeavors to find the purloined letter.

As the Prefect tells Dupin, the police have “ransacked” the Minister’s home (Poe 209). They have searched in the most miniscule and hidden reaches of the rooms, often using scientific gadgets such as “a most powerful microscope” (212) to analyze the furniture in the house. By stepping into the Minister’s shoes and using the same reasoning as the culprit, Dupin then realizes that it is this “scientific” type of deduction that has hampered the Prefect.

The Prefect, he comments, is skeptical of the Minister's mental faculties and this misconception has impacted his view of the perpetrator: "... the remote source of [the Prefect's] defeat lies in the supposition that the Minister is a fool, because he has required renown as a poet. All fools are poets; this the Prefect *feels*; and he ... thence [infers] that all poets are fools" (217). According to Dupin, the Prefect fails yet again to corner the criminal because he illogically assumes that the Minister is intellectually inferior. Dupin implies that the Prefect looks upon science as inherently superior to art, evident by the fact that the Prefect employs a strictly scientific method of investigation. The Minister, however, is skilled in both areas. "As both poet *and* mathematician," Dupin notes, "[the Minister] would reason well," (217) because he has a more well-rounded intellect. The Prefect, however, remains at the mercy of the Minister, because he has yet to realize this fact.

Throughout the text of "The Purloined Letter," it is apparent that Poe favors the more abstract method of deduction which Dupin employs, and that Poe uses "The Purloined Letter" as a means to investigate this manner of reasoning. In regards to this view, Sova asserts that "Poe refutes the value of the Prefect's scrupulously scientific methods of investigation" (153). Several times in the story, Dupin mentions that the Prefect "might ... do a little more" (Poe 214) to solve the case, implying that the Prefect is not fully exercising his own mind. In order to achieve this perfect intellect, Poe insinuates that the Prefect must combine the rational logic of science with the aesthetic beauty of art. This and this alone will lead him to the stolen letter.

Poe scholar Jan Whitt notes that "Poe proposes ... that the analytical perspective of mathematics and the physical sciences is limited, and in C. Auguste Dupin he unites

the critical powers of reasoning with the energy of the heart” (61). In essence, it can be said that “The Purloined Letter” aims to prove that science and art go hand-in-hand, and that an intellect is wholly lacking if it does not rely upon both of these disciplines.

This idea is further apparent when the reader considers the narrative structure of “The Purloined Letter.” Instead of finding a typical action-filled crime drama, the reader encounters an erudite story of critical analysis, told primarily through a first-person narrative. The reader finds little dramatic action; there are no police chases through dark alleys, no gunshots or death threats. The story is merely a recounting of the methods of deduction used to find the object in question. Within the story, Dupin concerns himself more with understanding the criminal and thinking about man’s inherent nature than simply retrieving the stolen item. By arranging “The Purloined Letter” in this way, Poe conveys to the reader that the tale is not meant to be a dramatic account of snaring a culprit. The narrative is actually concerned with investigating the broader ideas of logic, reasoning, and deduction, and how they can be used to augment an individual’s understanding of human nature. In effect, the reader would not truly understand this idea if the story were merely a short series of dramatic events.

With this appraisal in mind, it is interesting to consider the radio adaptation of “The Purloined Letter.” Poe’s detective story was adapted for radio in the fall of 1948, and aired on *The NBC University Theatre*, a program that placed a unique emphasis on education rather than entertainment: “*The NBC University Theatre* ... came to radio July 30, 1948, with 60-minute adaptations of modern novels, tied to college-supervised home-study courses ... [T]he producers always invited listeners to use the broadcast as a springboard for a reading of the novel” (Dunning 438). The program was cleverly

“programmed in semesters, with each featuring British and American authors of a certain era” (438), and various universities throughout the United States used *The NBC University Theatre* in connection with their own literature classes.

During its three-year run, the show presented adaptations of well-known classics such as John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* and Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* (Dunning 438). Furthermore, “when ‘The Purloined Letter’ aired ... *The NBC University Theatre* was already drawing high praise for its adaptations ...” (Fitzgerald 13). The show won numerous awards during its relatively short tenure, including the Peabody Award, a prestigious and coveted honor given only to the most outstanding radio programming.

The NBC University Theatre adaptation of “The Purloined Letter” was presented on September 17, 1948—only a few short months into the show’s time on the air—and it is certainly noteworthy. After all, as previously mentioned, Poe’s original story is primarily told through a first-person narrative that is vital to the overall intent: the few pieces of action in the story are merely recounted through someone else’s eyes and are never directly presented to the reader.

Regarding the original text of “The Purloined Letter,” author Stephanie Fitzgerald states that the narrative fits more into the “armchair detective” genre of crime fiction, noting, “In Poe’s narrative, Monsieur Dupin never leaves his seat, and the entire ‘action’ of the story plays out in Dupin’s library. Everything that has occurred outside of that room is merely recounted by Dupin ... or the Prefect of police” (12). Fitzgerald goes on to comment that the radio version of “The Purloined Letter” is more dynamic: “The radio broadcast, however, brings all the drama to life. Here, listeners are witness to the ...

betrayal. They accompany Dupin as he sets the trap for his prey. And they listen in as [the Prefect] learns how the case has been solved” (12). Therefore, before even listening to the radio drama, it is clear that the structure of *The NBC University Theatre* version of “The Purloined Letter” will differ greatly from the structure of the original text.

At the beginning of the radio play, the Prefect, Dupin, and Dupin’s associate—actually named “Edgar Allan Poe” in this adaptation—sit together and discuss the case of the purloined letter. The Prefect begins the discussion in a familiar way, telling Dupin about the reward for the item:

PREFECT: I would give fifty thousand francs to the man who could help me.

DUPIN: Fifty thousand, eh?

PREFECT: My personal check!

DUPIN: Well, then, let us consider: we will take this case back to its very beginning and examine it. It began, we will recall, in the royal palace. Indeed, in the royal boudoir of the Princess. (“The Purloined Letter”)

At this moment in the program, the story actually moves from Dupin’s study to the French royal palace. The action is at once effectively moved from the interior of Dupin’s mind to the actual events which occurred between the Minister and his victim.

First, the audience listens in as the Princess (curiously changed from the Queen in the original text) receives and reads the infamous letter:

SERVANT: Here is a letter for you, Your Highness. It has just been brought by messenger.

PRINCESS: Thank you, Marie. (*Hesitates*) Marie, will you go into the wardrobe and find my other dancing slippers? These pain me.

SERVANT: At once, Your Highness. I will bring them right away.

PRINCESS: (*Opens the letter and reads aloud*) *My most dearly beloved, I am here at my estate, knowing that it is wisest, but I am as one in exile. Every moment I spend away from you is an eon spent in purgatory. Oh, why does he write this way?! It is too dangerous! I remember so clearly the look in your eyes on the day I left ...* (“The Purloined Letter”)

Just as the Princess reads these words aloud, her husband and the Minister enter her room, and the Minister immediately notices that something is amiss. He asks the Princess if she is all right, and the Princess shrugs him off, telling him that she’s fine.

The Princess’s husband Philippe then notices the letter and asks her about it:

PHILIPPE: What was that that you were reading as we came in?

PRINCESS: Nothing, it’s—it’s only an unimportant letter from some nobody in the provinces.

PHILIPPE: Well, then, put it down and make ready.

PRINCESS: Yes, yes, of course. (“The Purloined Letter”)

Noticing the Princess’s hesitation and her furtive protection of the letter, the Minister contrives to take it from her in a seemingly innocent manner. Philippe asks the Minister to make a note of some matter of business and the Minister uses this opportunity to steal the letter:

PHILIPPE: You will honor the matter exactly as I have ordered.

MINISTER: Very well, then. I will make a memorandum to that effect lest I forget.

(*Speaking to the Princess*) By the way, Your Highness, you will not mind if I scribble it on the back of this piece of, uh, *wastepaper from the table?*

PRINCESS: (*In protest*) Monsieur!

MINISTER: A thousand pardons. I thought you said the note was worthless. It is perhaps something that Your Highness *wishes to treasure*?

PRINCESS: (*Hesitates*) Why no, no, of course not!

MINISTER: Ah, good! (“The Purloined Letter”)

In these few lines of dialogue, the listener is privy to the events that have led to the theft and is able to hear exactly how the Minister tricks the Princess into essentially handing over the letter.

As the radio play continues, more action ensues as we follow Dupin and his associate, “Poe,” to the Minister’s home. On the way there, Dupin and “Poe” encounter a group of young boys arguing in the street over a game of marbles:

DUPIN: Hello, hello, what is this?

POE: Children. Ah, they seem to be after that small boy. Why, this is the small son of my concierge. Pierre—Pierre, come here!

PIERRE: Monsieur Poe, Monsieur Poe make them go away!

POE: Now, come now, Pierre, they’ll not hurt you.

PIERRE: But they call me, you see, because I have all the marbles.

POE: Have you stolen them?

PIERRE: But of course not; it is a game, Monsieur. One holds marbles in his hand, and the other guesses whether the number of marbles is even or odd. If you are right, you win one; if you are wrong, you lose one. (“The Purloined Letter”)

Of course, these lines echo the original text, and the explanation of the game of marbles is taken almost word-for-word from Poe’s original story.

After Pierre's explanation, Dupin steps into the conversation, curious as to how the boy has skillfully won a game of chance:

DUPIN: And you won all your friends' marbles at this game?

PIERRE: Oui, Monsieur. And now they say I cheat.

DUPIN: But I do not see how it would be possible to cheat. You must have some principle of guessing.

PIERRE: Yes, there is a way. I have only to know how clever the other boy is.

DUPIN: A-ha! ("The Purloined Letter")

In this exchange, we find the most important discrepancy between the original text and the radio adaptation of "The Purloined Letter." The original work shows that Dupin is a master of the theory behind the marble game. In fact, he is the one who explains the game of marbles to his associate, noting that the game is not based on guessing, but is based on an understanding of one's opponent. This leads Dupin to explain how correct logic and successful detection depend upon an understanding of human nature. *The NBC University Theatre* version, however, implies that Dupin has not previously heard of this theory and has no knowledge of how it would apply to the battle of wits between the Prefect and the Minister.

Therefore, based on the evidence given in the radio play, the listener can assume that Dupin is only able to find the stolen letter because he employs a method of deduction that he received from another source: a young boy. In the text, Dupin functions the reader's guide, providing a specific explanation of how he used his own abstract theories of deduction to solve the case. Within the radio version, however, Dupin appears to be

just as lost as we are. He is only really able to “crack the case” when he ventures outside of his home and encounters the young boy in the street.

By this point in *The NBC University Theatre* version of “The Purloined Letter,” it is abundantly clear that the radio adaptation is strikingly different from the original work. Essentially, the listener has heard more than enough to realize that the radio version of “The Purloined Letter” places more emphasis on action rather than the narrative aspects of the story. Thus, the listener has no choice but to hear and comprehend the story as a typical, commonplace work of detective fiction, simply because it is structured that way. Because the radio play changes the story’s setting from Dupin’s mind to outward events, the once interior-focused narrative becomes an exterior drama—a showing rather than a telling.

But what is wrong with showing? On the surface, this notion might not seem problematic. In fact, Linda Hutcheon asserts, “The most commonly considered adaptations are those that move from the telling to the showing mode, usually from print to performance” (38). More often than not, it seems, adaptation fundamentally grounds itself in moving from the interior to the exterior, in an effort to appeal to the listener or the viewer. Tim Crook furthers this idea in his claim that successful radio drama depends upon actively showing the plot to the audience:

Radio plays can apply some narrative elements with great effect in the construction of the plot, but because of the exigencies of contained time and the fact that radio drama is performed rather than read silently, the emphasis in structuring radio plays must be on the dramatic rather than the narrative. (162)

According to these explanations, then, it would seem logical that *The NBC University Theatre* writers chose to restructure Poe's story, making "The Purloined Letter" all about action, rather than a mere discourse of theories.

However, if we again look closely at Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition," it is apparent that by changing the story from a telling to a showing, the radio version of "The Purloined Letter" goes directly against Poe's ideas of story arrangement, and therefore, undermines his overall intent. In the essay, Poe mentions a couple of things that are necessary for the achievement of a successful composition, stating, "Two things are invariably required—first, some amount of complexity ... and secondly, some amount of suggestiveness—some under current, however indefinite of meaning" (683). For a story or a poem to succeed, Poe notes, it must equally balance a complex nature with a sense of indeterminacy.

In effect, it can be said that the text of "The Purloined Letter" fulfills these criterion completely. The story boldly moves away from the usual elements of the detective story and investigates man's intellect while also investigating a crime. This complex nature is only truly achieved because Poe presents the story as one man's recounting of a series of events. In analyzing the varied minds of the Prefect and the Minister, Dupin actually provides the reader with an analysis of his own mind, showing that he has deeply considered the human mind, and has realized the importance of conforming his way of thinking to that of the criminal.

The story also possesses a sense of indeterminacy as it plays with the seemingly disparate ideas of science and art:

The story exhibits Poe's fascination with what some critics have called the bi-part soul, which is half imagination and half reason. Roger Asselineau writes, 'His works reflect this double aspect of his personality: the abandonment of the self-destructive romantic artist and the self-control of the conscious and conscientious craftsman.' (Sova 153).

Within the tale, Dupin relies upon a mixture of science and art in order to reason well and thereby insinuates that man is at his best when he is not clearly defined—when he is at once both “poet *and* mathematician” (Poe 217). This sense of indeterminacy is a key element of the overall plot, and essentially explains how Dupin is able to find the stolen letter. *The NBC University Theatre* version of “The Purloined Letter,” however, removes this aspect of the story: we hear nothing of this integral theory. In short, the radio adaptation of “The Purloined Letter” all but ignores these two important aspects of the story and ultimately sacrifices function for form, presenting the listener with a dramatic version of a narrative tale, devoid of complexity and indeterminacy.

Here yet again, in the radio version of “The Purloined Letter,” we find that the listener is presented with a “pop culture Poe”: an accessible, entertaining, and theatrical adaptation that gives the audience only a side-view of Poe as an author. By removing the narrative aspects from the story, and presenting “The Purloined Letter” in a purely dramatic fashion, the adaptors weaken the audience's understanding of the work and turn the story into a dull crime drama. “The Purloined Letter,” then, becomes an ordinary story, leaving Poe to appear as an ordinary author.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION TO THE RADIO ADAPTATIONS OF POE'S SHORT STORIES

The intersection between Poe and popular culture is an interesting phenomenon that seems to be rooted in a curious combination of high-brow and low-brow culture. Critic Mark Neimeyer has noted that "Poe has been absorbed into the popular consciousness as an icon of 'literature'" (206), asserting that Poe has become synonymous with an almost unrefined refinement, an undeniable fusion of mass appeal and sophistication.

American culture has come to treat Poe as equally accessible and elitist. In support of this, it can be said that Poe is everywhere in society, not just in the more academic fields of literature, film, and drama. Appropriations of Poe's image and various elements of his work have appeared in almost every arena of popular culture: "There have been cartoons of Poe ... There are Poe and Poe-related posters, T-shirts, taverns and restaurants, toys, stamps, and advertising slogans and campaigns ..." (Reilly 490). Beer companies, sports teams, musicians, and animators have also made reference to Poe, furthering the idea that Poe is familiar enough to sell a product, but strange enough to cast a certain sinister and intriguing shadow over our culture.

Poe's popularity on radio certainly fits into this contradictory depiction, as it also appears to be built upon a bizarre combination of "Poe the author" and "Poe the pop culture icon." As we have seen, the radio versions of "The Pit and the Pendulum," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "Metzengerstein," and "The Purloined Letter" present an interesting view of Poe. In each case, the adaptors change the stories in profound ways, leaving the

audience with an incorrect impression of Poe and an erroneous understanding of each story's intent.

When "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" were adapted for radio, the stories ceased to remain the dark, edgy, psychological narratives that Poe intended, and instead became wholesome moral tales of good versus evil.

"Metzengerstein," Poe's first step into the Gothic genre, was turned into a suspenseful radio play that remained faithful to most of the important Gothic elements of the story; however, the adaptation ultimately ignored the supernatural, almost occult theme of metempsychosis—Poe's own original contribution to the genre. Curiously, the adapters kept the "scary" parts of the tale, but removed the menacing mention of a supernatural force, even though it was a key aspect of Poe's story. Lastly, the radio adaptation of "The Purloined Letter" failed to present Poe's detective story in its true light: a probing look into the methods of investigation. Instead, "The Purloined Letter" was turned into a mundane, run-of-the-mill piece of detective fiction—the exact opposite of Poe's original story.

Of course, these are not the only radio adaptations of work that should be noted for their impact upon Poe's legacy. In October, 1947, the *Escape* radio program presented an adaptation of "The Fall of the House of Usher." The story remained relatively close to Poe's original work, but with one important and notable exception:

Escape's version of "The Fall of the House of Usher" touches on the original story's central theme—isolation—by referencing how Roderick and Madeline stay locked up in their house. However, it skirts the Ushers' other means of

isolation and the true reason for the demise of their family line—incest—for obvious reasons (Fitzgerald 24).

During America's Golden Age of Radio, *Escape* was able to present story such as "The Fall of the House of Usher," a dismal, foreboding view of a decaying mansion which hides a similarly decaying family. The story is gloomy, filled with "mystery, darkness, supernatural, decay, a corpse, and even the suggestion of vampirism" (Sova 69). All of these "strange" elements are included in the *Escape* version of "The Fall of the House of Usher;" however, the theme of incest is neatly removed from the broadcast. Obviously, this interesting change reflects the standards of the time: it was acceptable to include the menacing, unsettling parts of the original story—corpses, insane characters, and death—yet the theme of incest pushed the envelope too far. Therefore, this adaptation presents audience with another of Poe's stories that does not accurately reflect its original intent.

Poe's short story "The Gold-Bug" was also adapted for radio, and interestingly, it appeared on a program called *Family Theatre*. John Dunning notes, "Most *Family Theatre* shows were upbeat ... The only requirement was that the story illustrate—without obvious moralizing or preaching—the value of family love and group prayer" (193). *Family Theatre* reminded the listener that "family that prays together stays together" (193), and curiously, "The Gold-Bug" was deemed perfect for this type of program. With this adaptation, we find another instance of society's paradoxical of Poe, an author who is simultaneously wholesome and thrilling.

Essentially, it is apparent that these radio versions of Poe's short stories play their own unique part in impacting society's impression of Poe as an author. Just as the other popular appropriations and adaptations have created a "pop-culture Poe," the radio

adaptations of Poe's short stories have presented a skewed rendering of the master of the macabre. As readers, we are able to fully comprehend the meanings and overall intent of Poe's stories, and we are able to appreciate his distinct techniques. Yet, when Poe's stories are adapted into radio plays, his original intent ultimately suffers, and his unique style of writing essentially disappears. The important elements of story construction that Poe explains in "The Philosophy of Composition" are also undermined by the radio adaptations, and as such, the listener is left with an overall peculiar, rather kitschy impression of Edgar Allan Poe.

In the essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," Clement Greenberg calls this low-brow or "kitsch" culture a commodity, something "destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide" (5). In my view, the radio adaptations of Poe's short stories certainly fall into this category. Although I disagree that the adaptations turn Poe completely into a "commodity," and thereby possess no culture at all, they definitely present an audience with a watered-down, diluted form of entertainment. Ultimately, only certain, very specific aspects of Poe's work actually come through in the radio adaptations and in each case, the listener receives a surface-level introduction to Poe's complex body of writing.

In conclusion, it is clear that radio adaptations not only say a great deal about the curious presentation of Poe as an author, but they also make a comment about American society during the Golden Age of Radio. During that time, popular culture demanded something didactic, something safe, something readily accessible. Although Poe seems like an unlikely candidate for such a task, his stories were standard fare for a number of

radio broadcasts that were heard widely across the country. Nearly all of the radio adaptations of Poe's stories were largely changed to present safer, more wholesome themes, yet paradoxically, slight hints of the macabre, small elements of horror, and intellectual theories about man's mind still remain within the plays. In essence, perhaps this reticence to portray Poe's true gruesomeness and his overwhelming originality makes a comment on American society in general: we are fascinated by Poe to the point that we feel the need to resurrect him over and over again in popular culture, but when it is all said and done, we only want to be reminded of *certain* parts of his style.

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